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DEADWOOD DICK OUTDONE! ANOTHER RIVAL! AN ORIGINAL!

Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch.

By Edward L. Wheeler, author of the Deadwood Dick Series.



"You may call me by the name of my original Black Hills baptism—'Rosebud Rob'—'a man to suit all circumstances.' Sorry I haven't a visiting card for you, 'pon honor."

Rosebud Rob;

OR,

Nugget Ned the Knight of the Gulch.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF NOS. 1, 20, 26, 28, 32, 35, 39, 42, 45, 49, 53, 57, 61, 69, 73, 77 OF BEADLE'S HALF-DIME LIBRARY.

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CHAPTER I.

"THE LITTLE BROWN JUG"—A FEW OLD RESIDENTS IN THE OPENING SCENES.

LOCATION—Deadwood City—that bourne to which many sanguine souls have emigrated, only to return disappointed, to the place of their nativity, poorer and wiser in the wickedness of a wicked world.

Time—half-past nine of a dark midsummer's night, when the heavens were hooded in skurrying clouds, and the air was sultry and close.

Place—"The Little Brown Jug," a combination of saloon, tavern and miner's club-room, at the upper end of the main street in Deadwood gulch, kept by an individual who styled himself Kentucky Jake, though it was positively known that he had never been east of the Missouri.

Scene—a matter of eight or ten men gathered around, some seated and some standing—men generally rough in appearance, curiosities in expression of countenance and cast of features, inasmuch as no one resembled any other.

First might be noticed for consideration, the cinnamon-haired proprietor of the "Jug," Kentucky Jake. A six-footer was he in his stocking-feet, with a broad chest and brawny limbs, incased to the knees in top-boots, while a heavy beard swept to his belt.

He sat behind the bar, upon a high stool, where he kept an eye upon the throng, and acted as cashier, while two boys served out the beverages below him.

The burly individual, with the bald head, and ludicrous cast of features—the chap who sits in a huge arm-chair with his heels elevated upon the deal-table, that's Colonel Bill Stokes—the man who tuk ther medal fur beauty, at the Centennial; a veteran of the Black Hills, and likewise, one of its pioneers.

Those two individuals at yonder deal table—the good-natured looking Dutchman and the fop, with his hair parted in the middle, and eye-glasses affixed to the bridge of his nose—they are lights of the legal fraternity in Deadwood, respectively "Judge" Jake Schriner, and Adolphus Syringus Cole.

Then, there are three rough, long-bearded, bleary-eyed toughs, loafing upon a long settee, smoking their pipes, and watching, with close scrutiny, every arrival and departure—men with evil-expressed faces, and a superabundance of belt weapons, which clasped them among that lawless type who fight and shoot at pleasure. The names of these men were, respectively, Hayseed Jim, Holy Moses, and Popular Pete, and each has won notoriety in Black Hills history.

The man who is pacing up and down the room, looking as fierce as a tiger out of his jungle, is the pard and leader of the toughs, whose name is Hickory Hank, otherwise Captain Hickory.

He is a wolfish-looking ruffian, with terrible blood-shot eyes, a dusky, villainous cast of countenance, and a heavy black mustache to lend him an appearance of the brigandish. He is a large, powerful man, with limbs of iron, and a deep chest and enormous muscles.

He is dressed in the usual miner's blue shirt, buckskin breeches, and knee-boots, while a broad-brim hat slouched low upon his forehead.

He seems entirely oblivious of the presence of others as he paces to and fro, a curse occasionally breaking from his lips.

Ha! here is another we have missed—a personage, beardless as a boy, sitting perched upon one end of the bar in lieu of a better seat, engaged in puffing a cigar, and watching the ruffian as he paces up and down the room.

This is a character almost as well known in the West as the eccentric Calamity Jane, whom she resembles only in the faultlessness of form, for her face is more prepossessing, her eyes bright, and her manner a trifle more cool.

Her name is Baltimore Bess!

Where she came from no one knows, nor is her history familiar to those among whom she mingles. It is enough that she dawned among them even as the sun rises in the morning, and after illustrating plainly enough that she was proof against insult, force, or persuasion, she had taken her stand as a "citizen."

Now, one more figure makes our tableau complete. This is the man of massive trunk and limb, who stands in a retired corner, half leaning upon his rifle, while he strokes his blonde mustache with one hand, at the same time watching those about him with an eagle glance from his blue eyes. Though not exactly a handsome man he is a brave one, and is well known as Persimmons Bill—a hero of as many daring exploits as those which have made Buffalo Bill famous. His hair is worn long, and, like the graceful mustache, is of a golden hue.

Kentucky Jake is listening to a conversation carried on between Colonel Bill and Judge Jacob, while he occasionally scratches his head as if tucking away a bit of valuable gossip in his large cranium, with its shock of cinnamon hair.

"I tell ye w'at, jedger!" the colonel was saying, as

he lit a fresh cigar, "my opinyoun o' thet Munro Malvern ain't none o' the best, bar'n' he hain't never done me any purtiekler harm. He allus 'peared ter hev a sneakish expression in his eyes when a feller luks great' inter 'em, an' I don't allow he's got any squar beauty to brag on. Fer instance: take such a galoot as me, and you've got somebody ter put before an artist or a fortygraffer w'out blushing fer ther model. I hain't no brag, pilgrims, but then I do remark, an' kin back et, thet I war awarded ther gold medal fer sweetness o' temper, modesty, an' winsome beauty at ther late Centennial exasperation—no, Exposition. Barkeeper, fetch me a 'widow's tear, if you please!'"

And the bald-headed veteran flippid a silver-piece up into Kentucky Jake's awaiting grasp.

"Ho! ho! ho! you ish der vainest man ash vat I never saw, Colonel William!" grunted Judge Jacob. "I nefer see but von man vat I tink more ash purty ash you—"

"Spirit of old Methusalah!" the colonel gasped, jumping to his feet, and then dropping back again into his seat. "Who is ther cavortin' cuss? Show me thet posey, while I stare him out o' countenance!"

"Vel, my dear William, dot old sassenger pe Captain Hickory Grim. Ha! ha! ha!"

And all laughed loudly, as if there was some joke in the idea.

"Yas! I don't know but Grim aire ruther a prepossessin' pilgrim, boyees, but then et's an insult ter rank his beauty w' mine!" the colonel replied. "He is not a lady's man, while I am, purty much, I flatter myself. Such a frank, open countenance, as mine would warp ther heart uv an anchorite—eh, Baltimore?"

Baltimore Bess took the cigar from her mouth, and surveyed Stokes from head to foot before she replied.

"I don't know, Bill! I hardly think ye'd make a fust-class charmer, ner an angel, ner a heart-masher, fer all ye've got a big fist an' a big heart. There are, undoubtedly, homelier men than you."

"Don't vas send 'em ter Deadwood, den," cried Judge Jacob, deprecatingly. "I vas get der night-shackass every go-to-ped fer seein' so many on-heathy sights."

"Spirit uv old Methus'ler! that's all right, Dutch; I'll get even with you in the sweet by-and-by. Kentucky! take keer ye don't sell Jake another smell o' tarant'ler on my a-c-c. Hello! what do you want?"

The interrogation being addressed to Hickory Hank, who had paused in his walk directly before the colonel, with arms folded across his massive chest.

"What do I want?" he questioned, his terrible eyes gleaming wickedly. "Well, I don't know as et's any o' your bizness, ye galoot, I war jest ruminatin' on yer beauty thet ye war puffin' up!" And with an impatient but sarcastic laugh, the ruffian turned away to resume his pacing to and fro.

"Guess something's pinchin' somebody's corns!" Baltimore Bess observed, as she puffed away at her cigar. "I say, Hank Hickory, what's the matter with you?"

"Ten thousand devils! Is it any o' your bizness what the matter is with me!" the rough demanded, as he wheeled toward his interlocutor, with a savage snarl. "Jest ye keep your tongue still, girl, or I'll spoil that pretty dare-devil face for you!"

"Ha! ha! Oh! ye will, will ye, Hickory Hank? Bah! you're a blowhard—a coward! Answer me a fair question—did that galoot ever come to Deadwood as ever won a victory over Baltimore Bess?"

"No! no!" shouted several bystanders who had dropped in.

"No, Bess, gal; nary a time!" added the colonel, rising and bowing graciously. "I acknowledge your supremacy humbly. You're a brick and I'm the beauty, an' that's no gettin' around it."

"Haw! aw! yes; you pe von beauty, Pill Stokes, like ash vat my old shack-mule pe, so help me!" put in the judge, with a grin. "Put, shentlemons, vy dis quarrel mit one and der oder? We war yust discussin' der affairs mit dot Munro Malvern, who owns der Big Bullion mine. You say, Mr. Stokes, vat Munro Malvern don't owe dot mine, sir?"

"Waal, now, I allow them war about my logikal remarks a bit ago!" the man of beauty assented, lighting a fresh cigar, "an' in my belief ther p'int o' them war kereet."

"Goot! Villiam, you dell us apout it, an' I dell you vat I do. I treats you mit a 'widow's tear,' der ferry first time I draw mit my pank!"

"Ho! ho! your bank's in your eye, you old Dutch sauer-kraut barrel; but I tell you ther same, as 'tain't gittin' late. Well, you see, this Munro Malvern, who cum among us an' opened up the Big Bullion, come by the papers o' ther lease in a manner ther warn't direct honest, I calkylate, an' w'en he struck et rich everybody war sorry, because he ain't no favorite heer in Deadwood. Now, hyar turns up a new customer—a good-looker he ar, too—who sez the mine's his, and he's going to have it, hit or miss. I'll bet he's a gallus coon, ef he ain't much more'n a younker, an' ef he'll h'ist Munro Malvern out o' ther Big Bullion, I'll give him this hayr right paw o' mine to shake as long's he's got ther grip—that's here, Colonel Bill Stokes, ther beauty o' ther mines!"

The miners gave a responding cheer, for the sentiments of the veteran were exactly their own.

Hickory Hank and his pals were the only ones who didn't participate in the enthusiasm.

"I'll bet my head ther'll a passel o' ye galoots go ter Sulphur City afore Munro Malvern drops his king pin!" the rough said, with a peculiar laugh.

"He's got more'n money enough ter buy substitutes fer a few sesh as you."

"Then I suppose he classes you among his pur-

*In Deadwood dictionary "a drink of whisky."

chased friends, sir tough!" exclaimed a ringing voice, and a new-comer stepped within the scene. "You, I presume, are his counselor and legal adviser—or maybe his servant!"

Hickory Hank growled, as he wheeled about to confront the stranger, who stood regarding him with a keen, unflinching gaze.

"Hey? Waal, I reckon when the boss wants me I'm generally around handy, younker. But, who're you? What bizness is it of yours who I am?"

"In the second place, it isn't the smallest part of my business to answer questions propounded by a tool of Munro Malvern!" the new-comer replied, coolly, as he folded his arms and returned the ruffian's stare. "I generally make it one of my points to find out as much as I want to know, without compromising my individual secrets."

"In the first place, which I have left for the last, I think you'll find my autograph written in the hotel register at the Metropolitan Hotel; or, if your pedal extremities are too weak and weary to do the difference between here and the Met, you may call me by the name of my original Black Hills baptism—Rosebud Rob—a man to suit all circumstances." Sorry I haven't a visiting card for you, 'pon honor."

The speaker was an individual of an age just in the promise of dawning manhood, with a form that, though erect and slim, was closely knit and compact as iron, as was attested by the quickness in every move, and by the swell of the various muscles. His face was a handsome one, the skin being pure, and the features quite perfect. The eyes were brown and of a penetrating cast, and the hair of the same hue, while he wore a slight mustache, and "sides" along down in front of either ear.

He was dressed in neatly fitting pants of some grayish stuff, and these were in turn met at the waist by a blue miner's shirt, with broad collar, and a belt around the waist, bearing upon it in large gold letters the name—

"ROSEBUD ROB."

A jauntily slouched black hat was upon his head, and patent-leather boots upon his feet, the leathern leggings reaching above his knees.

So much for the appearance of the young stranger, as he stood coolly confronting a man acknowledged by all to be the worst desperado in the mines.

"Say, Col'nel Bill!" uttered Baltimore Bess, in an undertone, as she pointed toward Rosebud Rob—"whar aire you now on beauty? Jest luk at that darlin', will ye—purty as ary posey thet a jack-mule ever stepped on."

"True enough, Bess, gal; he ar' ruther a remarkable-lookin' galoot, but then—Pshaw! whar's yer eye fer beauty ef ye ain't gazin' at yer unkles?"

By this time Rosebud Rob had stared the ruffian out of countenance, and with a cool laugh sauntered toward the bar, against which he leaned, with a graceful pose, as he glanced about the room.

"Hain't seen a chap in here by the cognominous appellation of Munro Malvern, have you, gentlemen?" he said, presently, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"Nary a time, stranger!" the colonel made bold to answer. "I don't allow thet Munro Malvern hes any desire ter git inter ther Jug, bein's we ain't got no purtiekler luv for him, in purtiekler, ef I know et."

"Oh! is that so? Well, then add my affection in with yours, in that respect!" Rosebud Rob replied, with a laugh.

"Then you don't luv ther owner of the Big Bullion mine?"

"If you mean Munro Malvern, no! No, a thousand times. Perhaps if you were to tell him that Rosebud Rob, the Dandy, Sport, and Man to Suit all Circumstances, hated him, he'd be surprised, as I dare say he never heard of the above-mentioned individual. But he shall know me, ere long! ha! ha! Yes; he shall know me. Good-evening, gentlemen; if I have disturbed you, pray pardon me," and the Sport began to move toward the door.

But he paused involuntarily, when Baltimore Bess slid down from her seat upon the bar.

"Hold up, pard!" she said, thrusting out a fair, faultless hand; "jest gripe thet paw before ye go, and count on Baltimore Bess as yours truly!"

"What! a woman in these strange surroundings?" the Sport gasped, gazing sharply at the strange girl—a woman in men's garb!

"Waal, now, you chalk et squar, pardner, thet I am jest about one o' them 'ar same, an' no mistakes. 'Spect ye calkylate a female ken't wear breeches, an' be a fust-class article, eh? Jest ax old Beauty, yonder, an' he'll give ye my pedigree, so fur as he knows."

"Yes, ye purty much bet we kin, stranger!" Colonel Bill made haste to say, as he rose and limped forward by the aid of his crooked cane. "Thet ar' Baltimore Bess ain't no funnk, ner no slouch, an' don't ye forget it. She ar' made o' stiff timber, an' when ye ketch her sleepin' thru a sermon, jest let me know!"

"I am glad to know it, sir, and I thank you, miss, for your proffered friendship. Believe me, I shall not forget you. For the present, however, *au revoir!*"

And in a moment more the dandy was gone from the "Jug."

"Oh! heaving! w'at han lawful swell!" gasped Adolphus Syringus Cole, readjusting his eye-glasses back to the bridge of his nose. "Aw! Isa-ay, friend Jacob, was that all weally troo—no deuced sham?"

"I spects ash vot et vas all shennine mitout any counterfitts!" the judge replied, with a grim nod.

"Eh? colonel, vat you t'inks?"

"Thet he war a brick—a ginnywine, double-gearred, masheen-compressed, patent-polished brick. Thet's my estimation, judge!"

"And mine is, that he's ther purtiest galoot as stands above five feet, in these hayr mines!" cried Baltimore Bess, slapping Stokes smartly on the shoulder.

"What! what! Bess, ye don't mean ter go back on yer uncle, who actooally won ther gold medal fer sublimity un' individual beauty, at ther Centenyal Exsperityun!"

"Can't help et, old covey; Rosebud Rob's jest ther very putrest in these hayr mines, an' hayr's what kin lick the galoot who wants ter go aft' o' my declaration."

"Mebbe ye want'er lick me!" growled Hickory Hank, with an insolent leer, as he stepped nearer.

"No! Hank Grim. I want nothing to do with you; not that I am afraid of you—you know better than that. But there are others who want to get a clip at you, and I won't stand in their way! Got away; your breath smells of Kentucky's bed-bug poison. Don't tempt me to shoot—you know my aim!"

The ruffian muttered a fierce curse, and turned toward the door, with a beckon of his hand to his comrades.

"Never mind, girl! A day must come soon for a settlement 'twixt you and I. Never mind, I say. I'll get even with you yet—ha! ha! ha!—yes, I'll get even with you in a way ye little dream of, curse ye!"

Then the ruffian entered out into the blackness of the midsummer's night, followed by his pals in villainy.

CHAPTER II

THE MILLIONAIRE—MINE-OWNER AND STEP-SON—A STRANGE VISITOR.

MUNRO MALVERN was classed among the wealthiest men in Deadwood City.

He had come there a man of no particular importance, and as was supposed, purchasing the claim, now known as the Big Bullion Mine, had opened it up on a large scale, and as a result it yielded the greatest per cent. of gold of any mine in that section of the Black Hills.

Becoming suddenly prosperous, the speculator had invested heavily in different schemes, which netted him a princely income, and while he was reputed to be a bear in the market, and a ruling sovereign, his thousands were rapidly accumulating.

His residence in Deadwood Gulch was of modern style of architecture, with every convenience attached, and the few who had ever been inside it pronounced it a palace, compared with the other dwellings in the Golden City.

Let us pass along up through the crowded street, and ring at the door of the palatial mansion.

A colored servant answers our summons, and ushers us into a handsomely frescoed hall, up a grandly carpeted stairs, and to the door of the millionaire's sumptuous library.

Let us pause and peep in.

The room is furnished in grand style, for being so far toward the setting sun. There is a rich, bright-hued matting, dotted here and there with plush rugs; and the furniture, consisting of marble-inlaid center-tables, luxurious sofas, and large cushioned chairs; while against the walls stand towering book-cases of polished walnut, and filled with choice bound volumes; here are magnificent oil landscapes, and there are valued statues in either corner.

On this same night of our opening scene in the "Little Brown Jug," the owner of all these magnificent surroundings, sat reading by the light of a shaded lamp, apparently deeply engaged in the perusal of a local newspaper, while he smoked a scented cigar.

He was a man of between forty-five and fifty years, but as well preserved as though he were but thirty. In stature he was of medium height, with a person that was neither massive nor yet unduly thin. His face was whiter than robust health would warrant, where it was not covered by a jetty beard, and his eyes had a treacherous, snake-like gleam, calculated to represent a sinister nature—a man born to plot evil, and scheme deeply to accomplish his own plans.

The advance courier of age had not even silvered his black hair or beard, nor unsteadied the fair hands of the mine monopolist; few would have deemed him even well in his thirties.

As his glittering gaze swept over the lines on the paper, a confident expression hovered about his bloodless lips, finally breaking into a triumphant smile.

"All my plans and financial schemes work like a charm!" he muttered, blowing a cloud of smoke upward, and watching it dissolve into space. "When I came here to this rough place, over a year ago, I had not a hundred dollars to my name, while here, now, the papers estimate me worth over a million of dollars, and compliment me as the most go-ahead and successful speculator in the Black Hills country. How sweet is the fascination of flattery! Ha! ha! ha! especially when one deserves it, as I do. Ha! ha! ha! Why do I not deserve it? Humph! things are working in an open groove, and it is about time for me to be casting about for one of the opposite sex, with whom to form a copartnership. I do not think I am yet too old to swing in double harness, if I can only find the right butterfly!"

"Haw! haw! Unky; so you think you are capable of catching butterfly belles yet, eh?" laughed a cool voice.

Munro Malvern wheeled about with a startled exclamation, then smiled as he saw the stalwart, black-mustached young man who stood in a careless attitude, just within the door.

"Oh! it's you, eh? Come in, Ralph, and be seated. So you overheard my soliloquy? Well, yes, I flatter myself that there are many women who would not despise the idea of marrying me, with my youthful appearance and the Big Bullion mine to back it."

"Ha! ha! ha! Very true, Unky, and as your stepson, let me congratulate you on your awakening to

the fact!" the other replied, elevating his heels to the corner of a book-case, and settling comfortably back into his chair, to enjoy a cigar.

"I dare say you have already cast your eye upon some piece of calico, whom you would be pleased to make Mrs. Munro Malvern."

"No, Ralph, it has not come to that yet, that I am aware of. There is but one woman in Deadwood that I'd give a snap of my finger for, and even she has long ago refused to open her doors to me."

"Ah! whom do you mean?" and Ralph Lamont elevated his brows as an indication of surprise.

"Her name is Jessie Mapleton!" the millionaire replied, an evil light flickering in his eyes.

"Phew! not the little washerwoman who holds out down the gulch?"

"The same. She has a wicked temper, albeit she is but eighteen years of age."

"And, old-maid-like, prefers to be independent and work for her own living, rather than depend upon the charities of an unscrupulous millionaire, eh?"

"It seems so, Ralph—but you do me a great injustice in calling me unscrupulous, when you know I am strictly honest, like yourself—" with a shrug of the shoulders, and a hoarse chuckle.

"Ha! ha! Good joke. Of course you're a paragon of honesty and integrity, Unky. But how is it that the little competitor of our Chinese nation, is down on you?"

"Oh! there was a slight matter of business between myself and her father, concerning his right to a controlling share of the Big Thunder gulch claim, and when the old man suddenly skipped out of Deadwood, she accused me of conniving at his disappearance. Naturally, I arranged matters so as to control the mine, giving her a dividend sufficient to satisfy any one but a sanguinary personage."

"And she kicked, eh?"

"Exactly!—kicked me out of the house, when I went to make her an offer. But, curse her, she shall yet feel my power—I have sworn it."

"Ha! ha! The girl is a brick, after all, and as I am about to make a *debut* into her graces, Unky, I trust, for the sake of the late lamented Mrs. Malvern, who was my mother, that you will the lapels of your plethoric purse once more open, and make me a liberal donation!"

"What? Why, you rascal, it was only last week I gave you a couple thousand to invest in a mining scheme. Where has that gone?"

"Evaporated, Unky—actually evaporated—gone into the cash till of Charlie Baggs's money-drawer, where bills of so large a denomination are usually deposited. Faro took it all."

"And you've not a cent?"

"Not the ghost of a copper!"

"Then you may go penniless. I am not obliged to support you."

"But you wouldn't leave me to starve, Unky, when you're rollin' in wealth and luxury?"

"Curse it, go to work and make your pile, as I have!" the mine-owner growled, impatiently.

"Oh! I couldn't, Unky; you know I haven't got the business tact, nor the capacity, nor the unlimited cheek required to earn one's living. Work, either with the brain or hands, is something out of the question with me!"

"And do I understand that you intend to depend upon me for support and *cash*, you spend-thrift—you lazy loafer!"

"Really I don't see how else I shall get through the world, dear Unky. Just ruminate back upon the late lamented Mrs. M., and—"

"Hang Mrs. M. If you want more money, you must work for it. The girl, Jessie Mapleton, must and shall be my wife, so that I can tame her—"

"But, hold up! You're encroaching upon my corn-field. I have already made her acquaintance, and mean to go ahead at once into her graces!"

"The devil! It must not be. The girl shall be my wife, if I have to spend every dollar I have. Do you hear? You must not interfere, except as I direct. What do you care about her? Bah! nothing! absolutely nothing! There are a thousand better than she for you to pick up. What you want is money to make you a silent partner in my individual schemes."

"Bully boy! Unky, you've just hit the nail upon the financial head. Shake! I'm your accommodating stepson—for the sake of the late lamented Mrs. M.—just so long as the jingle of coin produces phonographic music from the depths of my pocket."

"Very good. You shall be well paid, if you serve my will. However, I shall not advance you money until you perform your part. Here is what you have to work on:

"This man Mapleton is dead, and his daughter believes me his murderer, or in some way connected with his disappearance. She must be persuaded differently. Here is a letter I once received from Mapleton; you are a skilled penman, and must forge a letter purporting to be from the old man, somewhere up in Washington Territory, where we will suppose he is engaged in prospecting. In the letter I must be thoroughly eulogized, and lauded with praises—do you see? It will be easy for the supposed writer to say in the letter that he, Mapleton, having become deeply involved, it was necessary for him to fly for safety, and that it was only through the leniency of Munro Malvern that he escaped a violent death, etc., etc."

"Phew! you old scheming rascal!" the dutiful stepson exclaimed, as he ran his fingers through his hair, meditatively, "so that's your game, eh? Well, I don't see as I can do less than follow your orders. So give me pen and ink and paper, and cigars and wine, and then leave me to myself, and I will try my hand."

Without a word Munro Malvern set forth the re-

quired articles, and stepped into an adjoining room, furnished nearly the same as his library.

In the course of an hour he returned and found Lamont idly engaged in emptying the wine bottle.

"Well, have you done?"

"Exactly. Please examine," and he tossed a sheet of paper upon the table. "I think you will find it clever."

"It has been done grandly!" Malvern replied, as he ran over it. "Here is a hundred dollars for your pains. Now, then, I want you to deliver this to Jessie Mapleton, and tell her you received it from her father up in Washington Territory, but had quite forgotten about it on your first meeting. You are then to take your leave. Of course the letter will produce its effect, and in time I will call upon the girl. Do you see? And if I win her—"

"Exactly! If you win her, what then?"

"I'll make you richer by five thousand dollars!"

"Hurrah! that's me to a dot! The thing is settled. The girl shall marry you, or I'll go down her in Whitewood creek, as sure's my name is Ralph Waldo Emerson Lamont!"

And seizing the forged letter, the dutiful stepson made a hurried exit.

After his departure Munro Malvern sat for many moments absorbed in a brown study, while he smoked innumerable cigars.

"The girl must be the third woman who has taken my name," he muttered. "Ha! ha! what pleasure it will give me to tame her, as the buchario does the wild cayuse! Not that I care for her any more than does Lamont, but I am anxious to break and subdue her strong, independent spirit. I think I can trust Ralph, as long as I feed him with money. Ah, Brass!—to the servant who entered, bearing a silver card-receiver—'what now?'"

"A gallus gentleman, Mr. Malvern, who sends up his card."

"Humph! I wonder who?" the speculator muttered, as he took the delicate card, from which arose a delicate perfume of white-lily. "Few of these illiterate denizens of the mines boast of cards in their calls. Ha! and such a name—Rosebud Rob! Wonder what and who he is? Yes, Brass, you may show him up."

"No, Brass, you are let out of that job, for I have come of my own accord. You may retire, however!" announced a voice that, though pleasant, was sarcastically cool.

And there stood Rosebud Rob, just within the portals.

Nearly frightened out of his wits, Brass made an abrupt plunge out of the room, and Munro Malvern was alone with his visitor.

Rosebud Rob came gracefully forward, and coolly accepted the chair but recently occupied by Lamont. Since his visit to the "Little Brown Jug" he had made a general change of wearing apparel, and looked even more the dandy sport of the mines than before. His pants and coat were of the finest light wool, while the immaculate white vest and shirt-front were remarkable for that rough region. A diamond pined upon the latter, and scintillated a thousand dazzling rays. His boots were patent-leather; his mustache was slightly waxed at either point; there was a delicately-tinted bunch of rosebuds of various colors attached to the lapel of his coat; a whitish slouch hat was set jauntily upon his head.

"Well?" Munro Malvern said, as he surveyed his caller with an interrogative glance, "of what service can I be to you, sir?"

"Eh? What service can you be to me?" the sport repeated, as he lit a cigar. "Well, let me see. You read my name on the card there?"

"I did, and a very strange name it is, too."

"Humph! yes, when you've a mind to think so. Emanated, you see, from a personal peculiarity of mine, of always carrying for an emblem, a budding rose, pinned to my coat. Sometimes, of course, I have to substitute an artificial one, when the cold snows of winter are low over the graves of the dead and unavenged."

The millionaire started, violently, and gave the Sport a quick, searching glance.

But that personage was engaged in knocking the ashes from the end of his cigar, evidently unconscious of the effect of his words.

"By heaven! I am glad it was not an intentional stab," the speculator muttered, in under his breath. Then, aloud, he added:

"I suppose you have another name, sir, in addition to the *nom de plume* you have assumed? It is generally the case."

"So I presume; and of course I have another which I use on private occasions. Perhaps it is a name you have heard of before, since my father was once your partner in business transactions. My name chances to be the same as his—Robert Mapleton, at your service."

"Robert Mapleton!" the millionaire gasped, leaping to his feet with a colorless face—"Robert Mapleton?"

"That's what I said. Can't you hear? Robert Mapleton, or Rosebud Rob, for short—a chap purty much calculated to suit all circumstances, you see?"

Munro Malvern took several turns up and down the room; his brow knit fiercely, and his breath coming short and fast.

"Satan seize the fellow," he muttered, under his breath; "what brings him here? I never knew that Mapleton had a son; he never spoke of the fact. Pshaw! why should I act like a coward? I must face him and try the plausible game. If that fails—something else more soothing. He is here for a purpose. He is a cunning devil I plainly see, and all that dandyism is put on. I must face him, curses on him!"

It was several seconds before the mine-owner could

control his agitation, and when he retraced his steps, and reentered himself, he beheld the Sport watching him, narrowly.

"Well," that individual remarked, with a quizzical smile, "the announcement that I was Robert Mapleton, Esquire, seemed to cause you considerable emotion."

"Yes, indeed, young man. The name came down upon me so suddenly, that I was little else than overpowered by strange memories. If you are the son of Robert Mapleton, know then that he and I were boon companions, and sworn friends. When he suddenly was taken off, it seemed to me I had lost my own brother, and I have never ceased to mourn for him."

"Ah! I see you were very much agitated when I mentioned his name, and the bottle on the table suggests only too plainly how you have been trying to drown your sorrows!" Rosebud Rob replied, with stinging sarcasm, which made the millionaire wince. "Ah! let me see—how long ago was it the old gentleman took his departure from this earthly tabernacle?"

"Over a year ago. It is strange that you should have forgotten it, if you were in communication with him."

"Well, you see how it was, the old gentleman and I were not of very excellent terms, as it chanced. In early youth I manifested a reckless, roving disposition, and one day when I attempted to do Shakespearean characters in the horse-barn, the unkindly sire furnished the necessary adjuncts with a horse-whip. My ambitious spirit was set on fire, as well as the sensations in the back of my waistcoat, and bidding the old homestead an affectionate adieu, I wended my way down the old country road leading out into the world—followed by a load of buck-shot."

"For several years I battled with grim death in all its phases, and occupied positions in almost every trade and profession extant. My latest triumph was upon the stage, but there was a woman in the case, of course, and I had to light out, as I am particularly afraid of the feminine gender. So, chancing to be out in this latitude of the hemisphere, and having been apprised that the governor had hid himself hitherward, I thought I'd call around and see him."

"Well, sir, you came too late. From all we can learn, Robert Mapleton, Sr., has been in his grave a matter of fourteen months."

"And did he leave any wealth behind?"

"Not a copper. He died insolvent, having been very unfortunate in his speculations, and his creditors mourn his loss!" the millionaire said, with a peculiar, rasping laugh.

"Poor fellow! Poor, poor fellow!" Rosebud Rob sighed. "How very sad to contemplate!"

"But, perhaps I have wearied you, Mr. Malvern, and I will retire. We will talk again upon this subject. *Au revoir*." And with a meek courtesy, the Dandy Sport arose and abruptly left the room.

After he had gone, the mine-owner sprung to his feet, his hands clenched and eyes gleaming, as he walked the floor.

"Ha! evil take the fellow. He is as cool as an iceberg, yet [deep enough to drown all the devil'simps. Is he not here with a purpose? Certainly; though he may try to hide it; but, curse him, he shall be defeated at every turn! I will have him watched; I will guard every avenue. Then we will see what the young vagabond can do. This head of mine is older than his and more educated, I flatter myself, in forming easily-executed and efficient schemes. So that if I cannot outwit him, it will be a seventh wonder of the world. Ha! and the young washer-woman—she is his sister! Curse me, but things are becoming interesting!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CONCERT SALOON—HICKORY HANK ON HAND—BEL HELENE—HOW CINNAMON GULCH PANS OUT YOUNG LADS.

PERHAPS, reader, you have heard of the Jardin Mabile of Deadwood City. If not, you have but to inquire, and any citizen of that notorious city can locate it for you, if you wish to pay it a visit. As friends, however, we should advise you to keep away.

A scene of our romance calls us thither, and we go as an eye-witness of a picture peculiar in itself and confined to the mining regions.

It is a place with a wooden front, but after you pass through the portals, you find yourself in a canvas-roofed garden, with sidings of rough boards, and lit by flaring blazes of benzine gas from overhanging burners.

The garden is used for a variety of purposes, being large and commodious, with a substantial flooring. Here is a long bar at one side, with a villainous-looking chap behind it, in his shirt-sleeves, and behind him still, a glittering array of bottles, decanters, glasses and mirrors.

Yonder is a space allotted to dancers, and here is a number of tables, ever surrounded with gamblers who deal the brace and fleece newcomers out of their money on a variety of games of chance.

Yonder, at the further end of the room is a small rostrum, furnished with a drop curtain, and from this direction, the crowds that flock to the Jardin Mabile are generally greeted nightly by a song from some person, hired for the purpose, by the enterprising proprietors.

Several nights after the scene just pictured in a preceding chapter, the Mabile was packed almost to suffocation with rough miners and rougher desperadoes from the surrounding gold districts; the hum of many voices was now and then outgeneraled by some frightful yell, or string of curses, or maybe a pistol report.

It might have appeared that the whole population of Deadwood was present within the concert saloon and garden, but you had only to step out into the thronged main street to be convinced of the erroneous impression.

Anyhow, the place was uncomfortably full, and consequently the bar reaped a bountiful harvest.

A star was booked upon the boards of the Jardin Mabile to-night—one Bel Helene, a dead shot with the pistol—and, therefore, the crowds flocked in.

Many were the conjectures concerning her, among the crowd, some of which were amusing to hear.

"Purty!" said one burly bull-driver, with an impious expletive. "Why, she lays anything in the shade that evyer stood on high-heeled gaiters, you bet! See'd her down at McDannell's Bella Union in 'Shian, I did, you heer me, ther Wolf o' Wyoming, an' she ar jes' as purty as—"

"Me!" exclaimed a voice, and Colonel Bill Stokes ushered himself into the circle; "fer they do say that I am actooally the handsomest galoot as ever sot stogy on the Black Hills soil. Why, feller-citizens, I tuk ther gold medal fer sublime beauty at ther late memorable Centenyal—fact, I'll sw'ar to et!"

A boisterous laugh followed the colonel's assertion, and no one offered to dispute the fact that he attempted to establish, for Bill was an authority in correctness, belonging to the firm of Schriener & Co., attorneys and legal adjusters.

Close behind him followed the ever present "Judge" Jacob, accompanied by his faithful clerk, Adolphus Syringus Cole, the fop.

"Hayr we ar' ther bull legal fraternity o' Schriener & Co.; so dish up yer amusement!" the colonel yelled, as he limped along with the aid of his heavy cane. "Hello! ef hayr ain't the galoot they call Rosebud Rob! Shake, ye galoot!"

"Certainly!" the Sport replied, as he extended his hand; "glad to meet you. Quite a crowd to-night."

"Spirit of old Methus'ler, yes. Ef et war a sermon on ther great question o' future punishment, ye'd not see a galoot hayr. But, ye know, these hayr pilgrims o' Deadwood would go a mile any time ter get a glimpse uv a descendant uv old Eve. Mr. Rosebud, make ye acquainted with "Judge" Jacob Schriener, uv ther legal bar—also, Mr. Adolphus Syringus Cole, cleark o' common fleas."

"Aw! Pleas, sir, PLEAS!" Adolphus interrupted, in an affected drawl.

"Happy to meet you, gentlemen!" Rosebud Rob replied, bowing. "I suppose, like myself, you have come here to see what is goin' on, eh?"

"Vell, dot ish yust apoud der size uv id, Mr. Rosebud!" the Judge replied, with a dignified strut. "Ve pull up der plinds mit our offis at six, unt come der visit mit der elephant."

"Ha! ha! I hope you will enjoy yourself!" and with this remark the Sport strolled away.

Not unnoticed, however. There were many eyes that centered upon him curiously. Seldom did dandies turn up in the city of Deadwood of his peculiar type. His dress and appearance were in every sense elegant—nearly faultless.

Then he had the cool, independent bearing of one who had had a vast deal of experience—of one who was utterly unconcerned and fearless.

It is this type of strangers whom the roughs of a mining region at once mark out as hard customers to handle. Their study of human character enables them to point out the man they can bull-doze, and the one they had best let alone, at a single glance.

There was no doubt that Rosebud Rob was a quiet volcano. There was just enough quiet swagger about him to convince a close observer that "he had fight right in him."

As he strolled toward the rostrum he espied a piano, the instrument which furnished music for the dance, and without a request from anybody he sat down and ran his fingers dexterously over the keys, calling forth a strange weird harmony of sound. Then he struck off into a lively quickstep, which filled the garden with exquisite sounds of melody.

Involuntarily the crowd surged around him and everything became quiet, as the roughs and miners listened with keen appreciation.

Such playing had never been done before within the walls of the Jardin Mabile, and the roughest, most uncultivated spirit could but pause from revelry to listen, entranced, to the beautiful music.

Hickory Hank and his gang stood back near the bar, and the ruffian leader watched the Sport with an evil glare in his terrible eyes.

While he gazed thus he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and wheeling about with a grunt, he came face to face with Munro Malvern.

The mine-owner was attired in an elegant suit of broad-cloth, with a diamond-pin in his immaculate shirt-front, and a polished silk hat upon his head.

He raised the gold-headed cane to his lips to enjoin silence upon catching Hickory Hank's glance, and, turning abruptly, left the place.

The ruffian leader followed him a few minutes later and they met in a dark shadow of the mountain walls, which towered above the gulch like grim phantoms, where the moonlight shot in bars through the spectral pines.

"Ah! is that you?" the millionaire said, as the ruffian came up. "I am glad that you came. Have you been drinking heavily?"

"No; haven't had half a dozen snifters to-day."

"All the better for my purpose. You saw the dandy devil who was arousing the spirits out of that piano—the individual who styles himself Rosebud Rob?"

"Shedn't wonder ef I'd cast my eye at him!" was the gruff response.

"And what is your opinion of him?"

"Thet he ain't no slouch. He's got thunder, lightnin', an' a hull volcano all tucked under that white vest of his'n."

"Ha! ha! then you're afraid of him?"

"Did I say so?"

"Not exactly. Anyhow, I want you to pick a quarrel with him somehow, and you're certainly a hard customer to handle, so you can easy get away with him."

"How much insurance ye goin' ter put on my life?"

"Oh! leave that to me. You shall be well paid if you do the job well."

"Do you want him knifed?"

"I'm not particular about that. Suit yourself."

And, with this understanding, the twain separated, entering the garden again soon after.

Rosebud Rob was still entertaining his rough audience upon the piano, and to the music of a lively waltz several had paired off, and were adding to the entertainment in Terpsichorean revelry.

But the music was destined to cease as suddenly as it had begun.

Hickory Hank came elbowing his way through the crowd, backed as usual by his bull-dog pals, and advancing to the piano, he slammed the heavy lid down with an oath.

Rosebud Rob narrowly escaped having his hands smashed by the descending cover, and he leaped to his feet, a hot flush rioting over his countenance.

"What do you mean, you fool?" he cried, sharply. "Did you intend to jam my fingers?"

"Shut up, ye dandy galoot, ef ye don't want me ter make chow-chow out o' yer ear!" Captain Hickory cried, with a hoarse guffaw. "Reckon I'm purty much boss, hyar, an' ef I want ter stop the music ther's nary galoot as sez I ken't, ef ther old court knows herself!"

"So you think you're boss, eh?" Rosebud Rob said, coolly. "You're a big bullying bloat of a bull-dog, and I'm the very lad as kin back it."

A murmur of applause ran through the garden, for Captain Hickory was perhaps the most unpopular man, among the mining class, in the whole town, there were few who cared to cross him.

He now stood half-crouching, glowering at the youthful Sport, with deadly intensity. And the Sport met his gaze with a cool, unflinching stare, while a grim smile lurked in the corners of his mouth.

"What! what! ye call me names, ye leetle imp?" the burly captain yelled, as soon as he could find his tongue, after the astonishment created by the words of the Sport—"ye dub Hickory Grim a bloat and er bull-dog?"

"I reckon I sed something of the kind," Rosebud Rob replied, with a provoking smile, "and I'll allow I didn't cum purty much out o' ther way. So if you are in for a fight, jest say the word, and you'll find me the right man to suit this very circumstance. Come! don't be bashful about speaking up."

A loud cheer went up from the crowd.

Hickory Hank gave vent to a frightful curse, and, quick as thought, whipped a pair of revolvers from his belt, and cocked them, with an ominous click! click!

"Oh! ho! I'll show ye—ye leetle bantam rooster! I'll stop yer spoutin'—"

"Hold! Back you cowardly dog! Would you shoot down a man who has no weapons?" cried a ringing voice, and Baltimore Bess leaped suddenly in upon the scene, clutching in hand a pair of revolvers full as imposing as those of the ruffian. And, close at her heels came the blonde scout, Persimmon Bill, Colonel Bill Stokes, and Dutch Jake, the worthy "Judge," seeing which the miners every one whipped weapons from their belts.

"Curse ye!" Grim hissed, perceiving that the odds were heavily against him. "You and I shall yet hev a day o' reckonin', girl!"

"Shack 'em Jump-up! dot's fifteen hundred unt sixty-swi times ash dot pig loafer say dot same t'ing, Pessie!" affirmed the "Judge."

"Yes, I know it, Judge, but he knows me too well to believe that I am afraid of him. Now then, Hickory Hank Grim, what were you just about to do?—commit a cold-blooded murder?"

"Vich ish punishable mit der limb of a tree, or a fine of five t'ousan' dollars, ash I am der judge of der shury. I impose dot fine on you, Hickory Hank, unt pind you to appear mit der court. Adolphus Syringus Cole, yust make der t'ing town mit der record of der City of Deadwood!"

Adolphus, however, was not at hand, and so the "Judge" could not make a case of it.

"I cave—I'm beat this time!" Grim said, restoring his weapon to his belt, and turning as if to go. "As fer you, ye bantam dandy, I'll bore a hole through your heart, inside o' a week, or my name ain't Hank Grim!"

"But, hold on; don't be in such a hurry!" Rosebud Rob said, coolly stepping in front of the ruffian, and blockading his path. "I haven't got through with you, yet! You offered me an insult, and I never receive one of those *bon mots* without proper retaliation!"

"Hip! hip! hurra!" cried Baltimore Bess, swinging her hat above her head; "thar's a lad fer ye, pilgrims—a reg'lar ourang-outang up-an-down sport, as is a brick, an' I'll bet high on his keards, every time. Pull off her shirt, Hankey, ye posey, and show us ef ye kin fight!"

"Ef the younker wants fight, let him pull his perforator, an' I'm ready!" Hickory Hank growled, reaching toward his belt.

"Hold up! I will not fight you with weapons other than those with which nature adorned us—fists! Them's my terms, an' ef ye ain't a coward, ye'll come to the scratch!" cried Rosebud Rob, handing his hat to Baltimore Bess.

Grim began to strip without a word. Not so with Rosebud.

He simply discarded head covering, but retained all of his elegant garments. Fighting lines were chalked upon the floor by enthusiastic admirers, and in a few seconds the two antagonists faced each other.

Hickory Hank was a man of powerful frame, and as he stood stripped to the waist, his giant muscles excited a murmur of admiration from the bystanders.

The Sport heard it, and looked his formidable opponent over with a keen, criticising glance.

"Are you ready?" he demanded, a moment later. "Ready!" the border ruffian replied hoarsely, a confident gleam in his eyes—an expression of resolve and hatred.

"Very well. Gentlemen, I'll leave it to you to see fair play. I am but little known among you, but the assurance that my name is Rosebud Rob—a man to suit all circumstances—is sufficient guarantee that I'll play a fair game. Now, then, Mr. Hickory Hank, or whatever your name may be, if you will be kind enough to toe the scratch, I'll very plainly give you a few lessons, and show you how Cinnamon Gulch pans out young lads!"

"Hooray! Ghostly specter of old Methus'ler!" yelled the colonel, dancing about in extreme delight. "That's whar ye git yer timber fer presidents, feller citizens, you bet! That feller w' the rosebud in his coat ar' all thar, an' I'll bet my purtiest on it!" "Hayr, too, Bill, ye fragrant beauty!" put in Baltimore Bess, with an appreciative grin. "Ef thar ain't more electricity in thar dandy then I thort, I'll be shot. Oh! but he ar' an angel cherubim, Bill—a real recognized fography o' loveliness!"

"Bess! Bess! ye forgit yer lastin' obligations to me. Ye know I'm thar beauchifulest specimen o' manhood in thar mines, an' yet ye go back on yer unkle!"

"Don't grieve, sweet William, fer yer gold medal purtects ye from infringing on thar original copy-right. But look! the fun has begun!"

If fun it could be called, it was even so. The men had squared off with clenched fists, toeing the chalk boundaries, over which there was no following.

Rosebud Rob looked insignificant in size to the ruffian; nor did he push the battle. He simply warded off the other's blows.

But in doing this he is simply biding his time. He is watching an opening for investment!

Ha! there! he strikes a blow in an unguarded moment, full in the face of Hickory Hank, and he goes reeling to the floor like a log.

He is up again in a moment, however, and on his guard, an ugly bruise under his left eye, the rapid swelling of which will soon render that member temporarily useless.

More sparring now, which is done creditably; then suddenly there comes another resounding spat, and Grim again goes floorward, with a frightful yell.

His pals rush forward and would raise him to his feet, but find him utterly unconscious; while upon his forehead is the print of a human fist, in livid coloring.

"I think the game is over, gentlemen!" Rosebud Rob said, with a queer little laugh, while the garden reverberated with wild cheers from a hundred throats. "Anyhow, I've given you a brief illustration of how Cinnamon Gulch pans out young lads. Now, then, is there any one else desirous of coming to see me on the same uncertain grounds?"

No one, evidently. Hickory Hank had hitherto been counted the best boxer in the diggings, and the example that had been made of him was convincing argument that no one wanted to run afoul of the "breakers" of Rosebud Rob.

"Well, well, if there's no one confident, I'll content myself with one victim, though I'd much rather a half dozen had bothered me at the same time!"

And resuming the wearing of his hat, the Sport was about to take his leave, when the curtain rose from the little stage, and the manager of the Garden led out the star of the evening, Bel Helene, the pistol queen.

Instantly there was a wild shout, and clapping of hands, to which the young woman bowed graciously, after which she began her exhibition of marvelous target-shooting, with a revolver.

She was evidently yet not arrived at the majority age for women—she looked even younger. Her form, however, was strikingly developed, and her face pretty as a picture, in its wreath of flossy golden hair, with a sweet, expressive mouth, and flashing eyes of blue. Her dress was of Spanish make, with short skirt and spangled leggings.

She went through with her performance with admirable skill and exactness, putting each bullet where it was intended to be sent.

Then, with another bow she retreated behind the scenes, amid ringing cheers from the motley assemblage.

And after she was gone the question seemed to pass generally from lip to lip—"Who is she?"

Hickory Hank was taken out into the open air, by his pals, and brought back to consciousness, so that he was enabled to sit on his haunches, and glare around at his bull-dog tools.

"Cuss ye!" he gritted, savagely, "why didn't ye lay thet dandy out, when ye seed I war ketchin' it heavy?"

"Thar warn't no show!" protested one.

"Bah! how often have I told you ter watch me, an' foller my example. When I laff, ye laff; when I swar, ye swar; when I fight, ye fight. Now, I don't want ye ter forgit it ag'in, or ye ken't serve under thar flag o' Captain Hickory Grim!"

CHAPTER IV.

SOME DIABOLICAL SCHEMING.

BEL HELENE, the pistol queen, after performing her programme before the patrons of the Jardin Mabille, left the place by a rear exit, and with a dark cloak wrapped around her, hurried up the darker portions of the gulch, until she came to an unpretentious board shanty, over the door of which hung a squeaking sign, bearing the inscription:

"WASHING AND IRONING."

After hesitating a moment, she rapped upon the door, and then waited breathlessly.

Sounds of some person stirring were heard inside, and then the door was opened by a fair-faced young woman, handsome of form, and with an expression of weariness hovering about her eyes and lips.

She started with a low cry, as she beheld Bel Helene!

"What! can it be possible—*you*, Nelly Austin?" "Sh! Yes, 'tis I, Jessie. I have come all the way to this rough, lawless country, since we parted three years ago!"

There was not time for further explanation just then, for the two girls were locked in each other's embrace.

But later, after the first friendly greetings were over, and Bel Helene was seated beside her school-mate of other days, she gave an explanation.

"Dear Jessie, you ask me what fetches me so far from the home of my birth. I can tell you a little, but not all. Since the last we met, dear friend, all is changed. Shortly after you moved out here to the Black Hills, from the States, my father and myself emigrated to the Indian Territory, where he had been appointed agent over one of the tribes.

"During our residence there, a bold, handsome devil in man's shape, came into our midst.

"I feared him from the first, because Lucifer was in his eyes. He ingratiated himself into my father's confidence, and tried to pay me particular attentions, but I repulsed him at every turn. I could not bear him. I grew to detest the very sight of him—his every word and action was disgusting in my eyes.

"At last, I think, he grew to hate me, for he took every opportunity to provoke my anger, and publicly insult me.

"Hearing of his doings—but not from my lips—my father attempted to chastise him, when the heartless villain drew a revolver and shot him through the heart!"

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Jessie. "And did he escape?"

"Escape? Ah! yes, but it was with me close upon his trail!" the young woman cried, fiercely, her eyes glaring with a strange fury.

"I have pursued him with the perseverance of a bloodhound. I have daily sworn before my God to kill him, and I only live to keep my oath. Jessie, you are my friend. We have been as sisters in the days that have passed. I want you, now, to shelter me, while I seek the man who destroyed my father. Oh! d-d-o not say no!" and the girl dropped upon her knees, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Of course you shall stay, Nelly, dear!" Jessie Mapleton replied, pityingly. "I, too, am an orphan, and alone in the world, with no one to whom to confide, or that I can trust. It is but little that I have, but you shall share it as long as there is anything to share.

"Oh! thank you! thank you, sweet sister. I will help you all within my power, and at the same time watch for the man that robbed me of all."

"What!" Jessie cried, starting back, a look of horror in her large brown eyes. "Nelly, you—"

"Ay!" the girl cried, almost fiercely. "I bear a blasted life, and the accursed wretch is still at large. Oh! God, thou merciful One, how long—oh! how long have I got to wait?"

"There! pray calm yourself, and let's talk this matter over."

"Oh! no! no! I cannot—will not—cannot talk it over. It makes me mad! MAD. See! I am not unarmed. I have a pair of revolvers, and a knife of the truest steel, and with one or the other shall I take the life of the wretch whom I am tracking. Both weapons I know well how to handle; I have traveled from town to town, giving exhibitions of my shooting. Ha! ha! how earnestly I have trained myself, so that I might be prepared to meet my foe!"

Jessie Mapleton shrunk away, and dropped into another chair.

She was more alarmed than she would have cared the Pistol Queen to know; she scarcely knew what to do under the circumstances.

"You need not feel afraid of me!" Bel Helene said, noticing her agitation, "for sometimes I get wild, but am quite harmless. I will stay with you, and hunt for the man who wrecked my young life. He is here in Deadwood, I believe, and if so I shall find him, even though he be in the deepest disguise. It has been nearly a year and three-quarters since I lost track of him, but I am confident that I am now once more upon the right scent!"

On the following morning Ralph Lamont, the scheming step-son of Munro Malvern, called at the little shanty—the most unpretentious one in all Deadwood gulch.

The day was a warm one, and the door being open, he entered without knocking.

Jessie was engaged in ironing some finery for a party of ladies at one of the hotels, and she did not notice the stalwart, well-dressed *roue*, until he stood quite near at hand. Then, she gave a little scream, and stepped back haughtily.

"Sir!"

"Oh! don't be in the least disconcerted, I pray!"

Lamont said, with one of his most winning smiles, at the same time laying a card from his elegant case upon the table. "There is no need for alarm on your part, as perhaps you remember me as the young gentleman who chanced to rescue you from a party of attacking roughs, several nights since—do you not?"

"I certainly remember, sir!" the pretty laundry-keeper replied, without relaxing. She was quite alone, Bel Helene having gone out into the town, and she liked not the fawning, sinister appearance of this man. "I believe I thanked you at the time!"

"Ahem! well, yes I believe you did," the dutiful step-son of Munro Malvern was forced to acknowledge. "But—"

"Have you not presumed in coming whither you were not invited? If you are a gentleman you will retire, before it is noticed that you have entered the house of a single and unprotected—"

"Pshaw!" Lamont interrupted; "you are deucedly scrupulous, seems to me. I come of an errand, and here you go to ordering me out of the house."

"You are in communication with that base wretch, Munro Malvern, and that is sufficient!" pretty Jessie replied, pointing toward the door. "Go, sir! do not tarry!"

"On the contrary, I shall remain!" Lamont replied, dropping into a chair, and drawing a piece of paper from his pocket. "When I am sent upon an errand, I generally try to execute it to the letter. For illustration: here I have a letter from an old covey, whom I met during my rambles up in Washington Territory. The old gent had been prospecting it seems, and, having struck a gold mine, he gives me a couple of nuggets, and commissions me as mail-carrier of a letter to one Miss Jessie Mapleton—which I believe is your name, from all I have been able to ascertain."

"Jessie Mapleton! my name, sir? Oh! what can this mean?" the girl gasped, excitedly. "Let me have the letter, sir! What old man could wish to write to me? Oh!—oh!—if—"

"Don't be excited, my dear young lady. The letter will doubtless tell you more than I can; but I reckon the old gentleman was your father!"

"My father—*alive*! Oh! yes, God be praised, 'tis even so! Here is his writing—ay, and his signature. Oh, Mr. Lamont! how can I ever, ever thank you enough for this priceless gift?" the happy, overjoyed little soul cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

"By prizing the dear old father, who is even now blessing you in his distant miner's camp," Lamont replied, bowing profoundly. "Allow me to wish you a very pleasant good-morning."

He only retreated to the door, however, where he stood watching Jessie, as she ran to the window to read the dearly-prized letter.

"Oh! what happiness is now mine!" she muttered, with a reverential glance upward. "Poor Nelly! she has no father, a letter from whom would gladden her heart! My own father alive! It does not seem possible, when I have so long mourned him as dead. Let me see what he says:

"WASHINGTON TERRITORY, {
"CAMP GOLD PINE. { June 16th, 18—.

"BELOVED DAUGHTER:—This letter will take you by surprise, as you have probably mourned me as dead. But I am alive and well, and by an inestimable young gentleman, I at last send you a letter. When I left Deadwood (where you will remember I had a small interest in a mine), I was deeply in debt, and my creditors were threatening me with imprisonment—ay, promised to lynch me, if I did not square up. I could not, and so I was obliged to fly for my life. Munro Malvern (God bless him!) assisted me to escape, when death stared me in the face. He had helped me to money a number of times, until he owned my share ten times over, and yet his generosity did not cease till the last, for he gave me money and promised to pay you a competence from the mine. He is a noble and a good man, without a selfish thought or a fault. I am rich now, and in a few months shall be with you, to settle with my creditors, and live in peace and happiness the rest of my days. So I sign myself,

"Your loving father,
"ROBERT MAPLETON."

Jessie folded the letter, with tears of happiness in her eyes.

"Dear, dear papa!" she murmured; "and Mr. Malvern, too. How wrong I was to think of him so unjustly. I am sure he will never forgive me for my cruel suspicions of him."

Standing in the doorway, Ralph Lamont chuckled softly to himself.

"The thing works," he muttered, "and Unky's star is in the ascendant—likewise my purse will be attacked with a twinge of inflation. Ha! ha! that letter was a clever affair, after all. How deucedly fine I got in a personal puff about the 'inestimable young gentleman.' Ho! ho! Ralph Waldo Emerson Lamont, you're no fool yet. And now it behooves you to draw upon the governor for cash assets."

During the remainder of that day pretty Jessie was supremely happy, and went about her work with a brightness in her eyes that had been a stranger there of late.

During the afternoon there came a knock at the door, and on answering the summons, she was surprised to behold Munro Malvern standing upon the threshold.

The millionaire mine-owner was attired with scrupulous neatness and elegance, and he raised his hat politely as he beheld the pretty daughter of his former partner.

"Pray excuse me, Miss Mapleton, if my coming is an intrusion, but I once more present myself to request that you accept what is duly yours—namely, a revenue derived from the small mining interest."

which your father owned in the Thunder Gulch lode. The mine, I am happy to say, has panned out handsomely of late, and for your small interest you have a dividend of one thousand dollars!"

"One thousand dollars! Mr. Malvern, I could not think of accepting such a sum. Please step inside, and I will give you my reasons," Jessie said, handing him a chair near the door.

"Ha! ha!" the mine-owner muttered, under his breath. "Lamont has been here, and the plot is succeeding that well that her prejudice has been overcome, and her scruples allayed against accepting money from me, her benefactor. Softly, old boy—success is staring at you!"

The miner accepted the proffered chair, and then turned toward her whom it was his purpose to entrap as a victim.

"And now, Miss Mapleton, your objections against taking what is rightfully your own?"

"Mr. Malvern, your kindness I have never been able to appreciate until to-day, when I received a letter from my father," Jessie replied. "In it he fully clears you of all the unjust charges I made against you, and showed what a faithful friend you had been to him. I therefore feel it my duty to ask you to forgive me for all the wrong I have believed of you."

"Forgive you, my dear lady? Why, most assuredly. I have never cherished any but the kindest thoughts of you, for I knew you to be in error. So, the old gentleman has turned up at last, eh?"

"Oh! yes, yes, and I am so glad. Mr.—Mr.—I just forgot his name, brought me a letter from dear papa, who is getting rich, up in Washington Territory. But, sir, he states that at the time of his departure he owed you a great deal more than his share in the mine was worth; and therefore, I could not think of getting further into your debt by accepting money of you."

"Ha! ha! you independent little puss! You must excuse me if I admire your spirit. But those matters of other days are all canceled, long ere this, by the yield of the mine, and you have your own divider besides. Pray take it, without further hesitation, as it is rightfully yours." And the millionaire laid a neat package on the table.

"I—I don't know as I am doing right to take this, sir!" Jessie said, lifting the parcel and handling it carefully.

"Tut! tut! Quiet all such thoughts at once. Now, having freed my mind in this way, I have one favor to ask, and then I will be gone!"

"Name it, sir, and my gratitude will cause me to do you your will!" Jessie cried, gladly.

"Well, I want you to marry me!"

"What?" The girl reeled back a pace, in sudden astonishment. "Marry you, Mr. Malvern—I marry you?"

"Exactly! Is there anything so horrifying or out of the way in that? You are pretty; I am rich. I offer you a chance to become a lady of rank and station, and you—accept?"

"Not not! Oh! that would be impossible, sir. I could never marry you—any one. I prefer to remain single."

"And I prefer to the contrary. Promise me to become Mrs. Munro Malvern within the week, and I will leave you in peace."

"Sir! I told you no! Is that not enough?"

"Curse it, no! You must say yes!"

"Must? You dare to say I must do a thing? Sir! There is the door—go! This interview has been prolonged too far."

"Very well; I will go!" the baffled schemer replied, as he picked up his hat and strode toward the door. "I am of the belief that you will become my wife—ha! ha! yes, I am of that belief!"

And then he took his departure, leaving poor Jessie in a state of extreme agitation, as she paced up and down the floor.

"Father! father!" she moaned, clasping her hands in supplication, "come to me. I need your counsel. That man, I am positive, means me evil, although you believe him pure and good. I cannot trust him; he has the expression of a villain in his eyes. Oh! God, wilt Thou watch over me and protect me from evil?"

While, as he strode homeward, Munro Malvern was fiercely biting his lip with vexation, and cursing himself without limit.

"I was a dunce—a blockhead, to attempt to rush matters so fast!" he growled, savagely. "I frightened her by my cursed vehemence, and gave her an insight into my character. So that all my hopes of winning her fairly are at an end. Somehow, I am puzzled just how to turn. I must get her into my power, and force her to marry me. It can be easily done, if I play the right cards. Let me see!"

And with contracted brows the schemer strode along toward his own mansion, further up the gulch. On his arrival he found Hickory Hank seated in the library, enjoying the best the sideboard afforded in the way of liquors and cigars.

The scene maddened the millionaire, but he refrained from saying anything, for the border ruffian was a tool in whom he must trust for dark work in the future.

"Well," he said, laying aside his hat and duster, "see you are on hand, Grim."

"Ruther reckon so," was the sullen reply. "Cum over ter git paid off fer doing sum o' your dirty work."

"Ha! ha!" Malvern laughed, surveying the rough, critically. "I should say you got all the pay any one but a hog ought to ask for. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Curse it, governor, the little cuss war an' electric volun'us, jest as I told ye. He basted me two sock-knuckles in the bazzoo, an' I didn't stand up ter take no more. Ther print o' his knuckles, hayr, on my forehead, 'll foller me ter ther grave."

"You shouldn't have trusted yourself to fight a fistcuff duel with one who is evidently a trained boxer. Why didn't you shoot him from the word go, or tickle him with your knife?"

"He wouldn't hev et thet way, cuss him; and hed thet devil-cat, Baltimore Bess, to back him, an' ther heft o' ther crowd, so I layed off."

"Well, we shall have to study up some other plan to get rid of him," the schemer muttered, as he arose and paced the floor. "Hello! where's the packet of notes I left here on the table? Did you take them, Grim?"

"Waal, I ruther reckon not," the outlaw replied, with a chuckle. "Ef I'd got hold o' 'em, most likely I shed hev slid out. Ye can search me yerself, ef ye like, an' see ef I don't adhere ter ther gospel truth."

"Never mind. Perhaps Ralph took it, the rascal. Now, about this Rosebud Rob. What appears to be his business here in Deadwood?"

"Ask me sumthin' I know an' I'll tell ye," Hickory Hank replied. "Pears to me he don't hev no object more'n ter play ther sport."

"Good! Let him drop for the present. I'll tend to his case myself. Now, there is a girl whom I want arrested on a charge of theft. You are to get your gang together, along with the sheriff, and go search her house. No doubt you will find a packet of money in her possession, which she thieved from me. Do you see? She must be arrested, and taken off to the jail, and stand her trial. I'll turn up at the right juncture, and take the case off your hands."

"Waal, I reckon ye'll hev ter pay a good sum fer sech a lay-out."

"Of course. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you do the job up in good shape. Do you understand? There must be no botch-work, as in the Rosebud Rob case."

"You bet your boots the gal will be in the 'Castle,' inside of two hours, guv'nor!" Hickory Hank replied, as he arose and left the room—"that is, if any money can be found."

"Good!" Munro Malvern muttered, after the ruffian had disappeared. "Although it may cost me a deal of money, I am bound to win the day, yet. Once I get the ball a-rolling, it must not stop until it has crushed out of existence these two children of Robert Mapleton, who stand in my path. Ha! ha! did they but know it, and had they the right papers, they could easily dethrone me from the ownership of the Big Bullion mine, of which I owned not one penny's worth at the time of Robert Mapleton's disappearance. But, they have not the right papers; Lucifer only knows who has; and consequently the Big Bullion claim is mine!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MOUNTAIN POCKET—THE KNIGHT OF THE BLACK PLUME.

As windeth the trail of the serpent, the sinuous gulch upon which nestles the City of Deadwood, points to the north and the south. Branches of it there are in a plenitude; narrow fissures and wider forks, some of which the foot of man hath never trod; deep vales or pockets, mountain locked, through which flow streams whose waters are yellow with the "signs" for which the prospector seeketh.

In such a pocket, in between giant mountains, and communicating with Deadwood gulch by a narrow, subterranean seam between the stupendous walls, there is a solitary ranch or cabin, set down in the flower-decked bottom, and so neatly surrounded by towering hemlocks, as to be invisible to the naked eye, from the mountain-top.

The fact that horses grazed about in the little vale was the only evidence of habitation, for no person might be seen stirring about.

But inside the large cabin, there was a scene worthy of description—a scene peculiar to the mountains and the life thereof.

The cabin was simply one large apartment, without any division, or partitions.

A dozen or more net-work hammocks were strung up near the roof, which could be lowered for sleeping purposes; rifles, knives, belts, and the general paraphernalia of a ranger—or, rather, of a dozen of them—were strung about the walls, and in one corner a heap of saddles and blankets was deposited.

Rough deal-tables were scattered here and there, and also a variety of rude camp-stools and skin-couches. And, distributed about midst this scene, were perhaps a dozen men, either playing cards at the tables, cleaning weapons, or playing upon some instrument, several varieties of which are here and there about the room.

All of these men are masked, and attired in the costume of the mountaineer—the inevitable knee-boots, buck-skin breeches, and fringed hunting-shirts, and slouch hats.

Suddenly the inspiration seems to seize upon them, and, to the accompaniment of a violin and guitar, they break out into a wild harmony of song, a round dozen of well-trained voices, that pick up all at once every note, from the low to the high, and render it into a wild, peculiar melody.

"Hurrah! hurrah! for the mountain free!"

The golden hills my home to be;

The flowery vales and hidden nooks;

The pine-crest dales and dancing brooks.

Hurrah for the life upon the trail!

The gay free ride—hurrah! all hail!

'Tis life to the death, the days, the nights;

With thoughts that are free, and then free fights.

Hurrah! hurrah! we shout with glee,

A merry band of pardes are we."

"Ha! ha! ha! well done, my boys. I am proud of so fine a corps," exclaimed a ringing voice, and the door swung ajar to admit a new-comer into the retreat—a figure clad in the same manner as those

within the room, except that from the hat floated back a graceful black plume.

The upper portion of the face was covered with a black mask, through which peered a pair of eyes like dancing diamonds of coal.

"Hurrah! it's Nugget Ned, our captain!" cried the guitarist, as he laid aside his instrument and arose to his feet with a profound bow. "I allow, chief, that the Knights of the Trail are glad to welcome you back."

"I doubt not that you speak the truth, Idyl," was the pleasant reply, and the youthful chief clasped his officer's hand warmly.

"You are a faithful band, and I would be more than an idiot if I were not proud of you. I see you are all here," with a glance about the room.

"Ay! all done!" replied the lieutenant, smiling.

"When you order, they deem it best not to disobey the Knight of the Black Plume."

"Which proves beyond a doubt their loyalty, Idyl. Now, if you will fetch me a glass of water, I will rest a bit, and then tell you of my trip, and what I learned."

And while the chief sunk upon one of the stools, Idyl hastened to bring him a glass of sparkling water which he quaffed at a draught.

Then he bowed his head upon his hand, and appeared absorbed in deep thought, until the lieutenant aroused him by a touch upon the shoulder.

"Cheer up, captain! you are not downhearted, I hope, after your wild mountain ride?"

"Ha! ha! no, Idyl—not exactly downhearted, but rather in a mood for reflection—for recalling the past—the accursed—"

"Tut! tut! chief; reflection is what throws you into one of those moods which breeds the storm. I beg you will cast off the spell, and tell us of your trip to Deadwood."

"Yes! yes! tell us of the trip to Deadwood!" exclaimed the men, in a voice.

"Well, then, so be it, comrades, though of the trip proper there is nothing to tell. My ride was a pleasant one, for brave Meteor carried me at a merry gallop. I arrived in Deadwood to find that our worst fears have been realized. We have been spotted in our mountain home, as road-agents!"

"What? Can this be true?" Idyl exclaimed; "we branded as road-agents?"

"Ay! 'tis even so. The business which brought us here, and leagued us into a brotherhood, has been misinterpreted, and in the eyes of these citizens of the Black Hills we are a band of outlaws, and the name of Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulches, is daily growing famous—is each day being handled by lying tongues, and stands a rival to the notoriety of the widely-known name of Deadwood Dick!"

As he ceased speaking, the young chieftain rose to his feet, and paced to and fro across the room, his hands working convulsively.

"Ah! 'tis a bad thing, captain!" the lieutenant said moodily. "We might have foreseen that we would be discovered in this retreat."

"It is not that. I do not believe that our nest has yet been found. But they are looking for us, and it cannot be that we shall escape detection. We are branded as road-agents, and a reward is upon our heads. Our night rides through the mountains have been misconstrued—we are even charged, with all the latest, most important stage robberies!"

"That is bad, captain; there seems but one path open before us."

"What is it, Idyl?"

"To dissolve the brotherhood and scatter, leaving the secret which we have guarded so faithfully, to be found out by the world!"

"Ha! ha! are you mad, sir? Give up that for which—bah!—no!" the knight cried, sharply, breaking suddenly off from the completion of a sentence.

"When the oath is broken and the band dissolved, I hope I may be dead! Only one line lies before us—as brothers we must adhere to it!"

"And that is—?"

"To fight, when it comes to that—fight as devils, not as men. The secrets of the order must remain intact—the traitor must die!"

"The traitor, captain?"

"Ay! that is what I said. The traitor, be he the best in the crowd, must die!"

A low, hushed murmur from the men announced their approval, and to a man they rose to their feet.

"But, captain, that is a hard word, even in a whisper, to utter—that word traitor! Can you bring yourself to believe that there is such among our comrades?"

"Can I? I know it, Idyl. Has Nugget Ned ever given you a chance to question his judgment? No! Well you know that he makes sure of his points before he plays them. Look at this!"

And stepping to one of the tables, the chief drew a piece of paper, the shape of a man's foot, from an inner pocket, and laid it where all could gaze upon it.

Then stepping back a few paces, he drew and cocked a revolver.

A hush like death prevailed within the cabin. Not a man moved, but all stood as if rooted to the floor, gazing alternately at the paper foot-shape and the masked, stern-eyed chief, whom they were bound to obey, by an oath such as men ne'er before had uttered—an oath such as a demon would have shuddered to have taken.

"You all see the print!" Nugget Ned said, as he let the hand drop by his side which held the revolver—"you all mark it sharply. Very well: that is the exact track of some person who left this ranch, crossed the pocket, and went out through the fissure into Deadwood gulch. There, in the other prints upon the stage road, I lost the trail. Now, as none of the band ever leave here except on horseback, unless that member is sneaking away unknown to

the rest of the band, and there is but the one foot trail across the pocket bottom, I am positive that the man who furnished the news to the Deadwood authorities is a member of my band—one of you who are gazing at me as I speak. Boys, I hate to suspect any of you, but the oath we all took must be adhered to and the traitor punished.

"Therefore, I brought this paper, which is an exact measure of the foot. Let every man step upon it, squarely, and we will see who is the traitor!"

"But, captain, will it be just to judge a man by the size of his foot, when several may wear boots of the same size?" interposed Idyl.

"No!" Nugget Ned replied, sternly. "I am no murderer, and I will judge no man guilty until I can name further proof. Go on! I will shoot the first man who hesitates, for *he* is the traitor!"

Without a word the lieutenant proceeded to set the example.

He spread the paper out upon the rude earthen floor, and stepped upon it with precision.

A murmur ran among the knights.

The boot of the lieutenant was several sizes smaller than the paper print.

"You are not the man!" Nugget Ned said, bending over and scrutinizing the impression. "Idyl, you may step aside. Number One, you next."

A short, stout fellow complied promptly, quite covering the slip of paper with his stony boot.

"Not the one!" Nugget Ned announced, quietly, although there was a stern glitter in his eye.

"Next!"

Numbers Two, Three, Four and Five in succession stepped upon the fateful strip of paper, but covered it "by a large majority."

Number Six, a tall, strong-limbed fellow, straight as an arrow and compactly built, next stepped forward to measure.

He had only a medium-sized foot, and the attention of all was called upon him.

He was seen to tremble visibly, as he caught the stern eye of the chief.

"Step upon it!" Nugget Ned said, sharply. "Idyl, look to the measure. I think we have our man!"

Number Six trembled violently, as he placed the right foot upon the paper that was to tell the tale.

"It is exactly the size of the measure, captain!" Lieutenant Idyl replied, a moment later. "A shoemaker could not have cut a better pattern of the bottom of Number Six's boot!"

"As I thought," Nugget Ned replied. "Wesley Dandleton is the traitor. But I wouldn't hang a dog even on that proof. Some one bring a piece of sodded earth larger than a man's foot. Number Six will step upon it, and if his foot leaves an impression of a star in the heel, he is the man we want beyond dispute."

One of the knights turned to leave the cabin, but a cry from Number Six caused him to pause.

"Stop! you need not go to that trouble," the accused said, hoarsely. "I will acknowledge that the star is upon my heel, and that I am the traitor! God in heaven help me!"

And the wretch fell upon his knees, and began to groan and snivel.

"Stand erect!" cried Nugget Ned, sharply. "Keep back, boys—as the knights pressed forward with leveled revolvers—"I'll attend to this case, if you please. Wesley Dandleton, stand erect, I say!"

With a groan the traitor obeyed, but hung his head and trembled violently; more than he would, perhaps, had he not feared instant death.

"Look at me!" Nugget Ned next commanded, and in a tone which caused the guilty wretch to comply—for he knew refusal or hesitation meant instant death. He gave a single affrighted glance, and then dropped his gaze to the floor.

"Wesley Dandleton!" the Knight of Knights said, as he cleared his throat, "you have acknowledged yourself a traitor among us. You are well aware of the penalty which we all swore by an awful oath to mete out to that member who should deal by us treacherously. I need not say that it is *death*. You have done more than betray the secrets of our brotherhood—you have branded us to the authorities as road-agents, and we are henceforth as outlaws, though we have done no deed of outlawry. Will you make a clean breast of the matter? Tell us the why you betrayed us, and how far?"

"No! what would it avail me?" the poor wretch, demanded, hoarsely. "It would be death all the same."

"Ay! it could make no difference in that respect."

"Then, I will carry my secrets with me to the death. Go ahead and kill me. I am as brave now to meet my doom as I can ever be!"

"You need not look upon me as your executioner!" Nugget Ned said, calmly. "I will leave your fate in the hands of those who have been your brothers during our league as a band. Yonder is a box, upon the table. Let each man write on a slip of paper 'Yes,' or 'No,' and cast it into the box. I will then count them. If there be more nays than yeas, you are free to go whither you will. If to the contrary, you shall hang to the noose which does its work for many a traitor!"

At a motion, each of the eleven knights wrote upon slips of paper, and cast them into the box as directed.

In mute supplication Dandleton dropped upon his knees, and raised his eyes toward heaven.

Nugget Ned next went to the box, and with a coolness born of experience in critical moments, counted the strips.

At last he turned upon his heel, and with a new-born hope the guilty man half sprang toward him. But he shrunk back when he saw the shake of the knight's head.

"It is not what I had hoped for!" he said grimly.

"There is not one *nay* in the box, and your doom is sealed!"

"Oh! merciful Heaven!" the traitor murmured, dropping flat upon his face with a pitiful wail.

Nugget Ned turned aside, perhaps to hide any agitation he may have experienced, although the mask was over his face.

Several paces about the room; then he paused, and glanced about, into the faces of those who had served faithfully under his flag.

"Comrades! I leave you to execute the work you have unanimously consented to do—namely, the lynching of Wesley Dandleton. As for myself, I leave this valley for good. You can follow me into the neighborhood of Deadwood, and hold yourselves ready to answer the call of my silver shriek. Remember! the order of our union is not yet broken, and though you know not and never have known who is your leader, under the disguise of Nugget Ned, I believe you have enough confidence in me to follow where I lead!"

"Ay! ay! captain; I can answer as to that for the boys!" Lieutenant Idyl cried enthusiastically.

"Good! I am glad to know it. But now, *adieu*. I go to Deadwood on business which brought me into these Hills. Be you in waiting close by, but not in a body, with disguises in your saddle-bags, for you may be wanted at any instant. When they hang Nugget Ned for a road-agent, it will be because he cannot pull a trigger in self-defense."

And, turning upon his heel the chief of the mysterious knights left the cabin, without a backward glance.

Lieutenant Idyl then motioned to one of the number, and from up among the rafters the noosed end of a strong cord was brought down, until about nine feet from the floor, where it hung, swaying to and fro.

Not a word was now spoken.

The men went at their work as if they thoroughly understood what devolved upon them to do.

While several bound the doomed man, hand and foot, others placed a table beneath the noose, and a stool beside it.

Dandleton was then led forward, and lifted upon the table to a standing position, so that the horrible noose dangled before his face, as if to mock his fears.

"Mercy!" he gasped, appealingly.

"No! mercy is something I know not in the execution of my duty," Idyl replied, sternly.

He then stepped upon the table beside the prisoner, and adjusted the fatal noose about Dandleton's neck.

Then, he stepped from the table to the floor; there were several minutes of silence, after which the table was suddenly jerked from beneath the doomed man's feet, and he swung by his neck in mid-air.

Idyl then turned to his companions with a shudder.

"The job is done. Placard the body, and then each man away to the outskirts of Deadwood. Let not a moment be lost. Number Seven, blow the call for the horses; the rest of you gather up the traps."

The order was obeyed.

In fifteen minutes the cabin in the hemlocks was dismantled of everything portable, and the knights were ready for a start.

At a word from Idyl they mounted and dashed away across the valley, and soon were lost to view in a crevice of the mighty piles of craggy rock which rolled up into the picturesque grandeur toward a sunset sky.

Scarcely were they out of sight, when a man rose from among the natural flower-beds of the pocket, and glided to the cabin door.

It needs but a glance to recognize him as one we have met before, and that one none other than the mine-owner, Munro Malvern.

"The devil is to pay!" he hissed, as he skulked up to the cabin door and listened. "Dandleton, my spy, was not among those fellows. What does it mean? He was to meet me, an hour after dark. Can it be—"

He pushed open the door, and peered into the cabin with a shiver.

Then he leaped back with a yell.

A frightful spectacle met his gaze—a distorted corpse dangling to a rope in mid-air, near the center of the apartment.

And upon the breast of the lynched traitor was fastened a placard, upon which was written in crimson, the words:

"A traitor—A warning to those who would imitate his example!"

"Ten thousand furies!" Munro Malvern gasped, turning away. "Again am I foiled by that devil in mask, who styles himself Nugget Ned!"

CHAPTER VI.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING—BEL HELENE "TAPS" LAMONT.

We return to Deadwood.

It is now several days since the occurrence of the incidents, last narrated, in the mountain pocket.

Munro Malvern sat again in his library, and there was a dark expression upon his countenance.

"Curse on this worry which is now constantly upon my mind!" he cried out, fiercely, glaring at the figures in the matting upon the floor. "A month more of it will put me in my grave. Curse the dandy, Rosebud Rob—curse everybody and everything; I hate all! Ha! ha! they are working to hedge me in, these enemies of mine, and crush me out of existence. But, they shall find me steel to the last! I will fight them with weapons made of gold. Ha! ha! the Big Bullion mine is yet mine own. They cannot get it away from me—unless Robert Mapleton should come to light!"

"Robert Mapleton has already come to light!"

cried a triumphant voice, and the guilty mine-owner wheeled around with a startled oath, to behold—Rosebud Rob, the Sport, standing just within the room, attired as usual with the greatest precision.

"Ha! you!" the millionaire gasped, a glare of hatred coming into his eyes.

"Rather calculate that it isn't no one else!" was the cool reply. "One would have guessed that you were expecting to see a ghost by the way you looked around!"

"I was not expecting you, curse your impudence!" How did you gain admission, sir?"

"Oh! that was easy enough. I allowed a small sized six-shooter, which I generally carry, to grin at your Ethiopian servitor, down in the hall, and he made himself invisible in the wink of a cat's eye."

Munro Malvern arose from his seat, a hard expression coming over his features.

"See here!" he said, bending toward the Sport, a devilish glitter in his eyes—"we may as well understand each other at once. You have come here to Deadwood for a purpose. You need not deny it, for I know to the contrary. What is that purpose, curse you—what is it?"

"Tut! tut!" Rosebud Rob said, calmly; "don't get excited! We can just as well take things like an icicle, as to boil over with a superfluity of wrath. You will find it to your advantage to not get unruly!"

Malvern fairly frothed at the mouth, as he heard and glared at his cool visitor. All the evil passions of his evil nature were aroused—he could have flown at the Sport and clawed his heart out.

"Furies take you!" he hissed, his fingers clenching and opening convulsively. "What do you want?"

"You shall know!" Rosebud Rob said, a sudden grimness coming over him—"you shall know, Munro Malvern. I have come here to investigate a few matters relating to the decease of my father, Robert Mapleton, and to his estate. You must know that I would naturally have an interest in the case. I have not been idle—oh! no. I have been digging deep after the truth—searching for the truth that would hang you upon a murderer's gallows."

"Ha! ha! you start, you black-hearted villain—you start! you tremble! What better acknowledgment can there be of your guilt? Tell me, Munro Malvern—where is my father, the owner of the Big Bullion mine, whose place you are usurping?"

And the tones of the speaker were fierce and threatening.

The mine-monopolist staggered back, like a wolf at bay.

"Blast you!" he gasped, his face distorted by a terrible rage. "What do you mean? Would you brand me with murder, you viper? Get clear of my house, before I am tempted to murder you!"

"Ha! ha!" Rosebud Rob laughed, coolly. "No doubt you are sorely tempted to do that very thing, now, but you realize it is out of your power. Sit down, Munro Malvern, and let me relate a little story. It is not of great length. It serves to introduce to you the man you see before you—A Man to Suit All Circumstances! Will you listen?"

"Go on," the mine-owner growled, savagely. "I will hear you, standing. When you are through—go!"

"Exactly! When I am through, I will go, I assure you. Now about the story. To begin with:

"Once upon a time, as all fairy tales open, there came into the precincts of the mining strike in Cinnamon gulch, a queer old customer of the tramp species, who had in his possession a youth whom the tramp family called 'sonny.' This youth was a lad who had buffeted the world alone for some years, until he had joined in with the tramp."

"End of Chapter First!"

"In Chapter Second we find the youth developing, under the old man's instructions, into a first-class actor, albeit this same youth had previously been upon the stage, in minor parts. The old man furnishes him with money in plenty, and tutors him into a man ready to suit all circumstances—a dare-devil—a prize-fighter, a young bully—yet, a gentleman."

"Chapter Third. This youth 'pans out in purty much good style,' in the vernacular of Cinnamon gulch, and men soon understand that, although a dandy, a sport, a man to suit all circumstances, this individual is a man who fears naught, and that once upon the scent of a foe, bloodhound-like he follows—ferret-like he pursues with a vengeance, until the game pauses, baffled, cornered, foiled at every turn, with an eternity at either hand—a yawning gulf over which there is no escape!"

"Chapter Fourth. The old tramp dies, and discloses an important secret, and wills his money to this pard of his, with the provision that the young individual, who, from a fondness of wearing buttonhole bouquets had earned the sobriquet of Rosebud Rob, would agree to certain things which he might name."

"Of course this Rosebud Rob did agree, where upon ends the sanguine romance. Do you see the point, Munro Malvern?"

"I see no point in your nonsensical attempt at story-telling, sir."

"Then, know you, that I have struck the scent, and shall hunt you down to the end of the trail of guilt which you are following. I shall not have the least mercy on you, because you are not of those merciful. You murdered my father, Robert Mapleton, Senior. I cannot prove it, and accordingly shall not noise it abroad at present. But, I shall guard you as I would a nugget of gold—ha! ha! yes, and when it comes handiest I shall accept the Big Bullion mine from your hands, while your neck is put inside Judge Lynch's accommodating noose. Ha! ha! ha!"

And, as he finished speaking, Rosebud Rob turned partly toward the door, as if to depart.

In an instant, the right hand of Munro Malvern flew toward an inside pocket in his coat; but he dropped it, half reluctantly, to his side, when he saw that the piercing gaze of Rosebud Rob was upon him.

The Sport smiled coolly, as he saw the steely glitter in the villain's eyes change to an expression of shame.

"Ho! ho! so you would murder me when my back is turned? Well! well! we will look out for you. I will watch you as the cat watches the mouse. To you, I will be omnipresent. I am going now, Munro Malvern; so do not get unduly impatient. But, before I go, there is one question I would ask you: If I let you off and allow you for your crimes, will you surrender to me the Big Bullion mine, and point out to me the burial-place of my father?"

"Not ten thousand times, no," the miner-millionaire cried. "I defy you, Robert Mapleton—I defy you! The Big Bullion mine belongs to me. You can not prove that your father ever owned one penny's interest in it; nor can you prove that I had anything to do with the sudden disappearance of your father, over a year ago."

"We will see!" Rosebud Rob said, grimly. "Mr. Munro Malvern, I bid you a pleasant good-evening—a very, very pleasant good-evening."

And, turning suddenly, the Sport was gone, leaving his foe glaring after him in a silent paroxysm of rage.

When he could once more find his tongue, a frightful volley of oaths escaped him.

"Infernal curses overtake that fellow!" he roared, pacing up and down the room. "He is cool, crafty, cunning—all this and more. His little story was meant to intimidate me. He is a ferret—a sleuth, a bloodhound, and I am not so blind as not to see that he will work against me with deadly determination. But I shall return fire for fire; I shall discard scruples, and, aided by my right bower, the devil, it will be strange if he cannot be put out of the way. Are there any unguarded points? If so, they are not visible to me."

"This old tramp he speaks of, who was he? Bah! why make a retrospection? Were you to look back over your career, Munro Malvern, no doubt any number of old skeletons and unearthly visitants would grin at you. Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!"

And the heart-hardened man of the world laughed hoarsely, as if there were some huge satisfaction in his words that touched the secret spring of his humor.

The city of Deadwood boasts of gambling places in great number—perhaps, of more than any place of its size in the world.

The great mining country, of which Deadwood is literally the center-pin has its great hosts of toilers, and hence the numerous dens where games are run by sharpers whose only business it is to lay for and fleece the unwary at every chance.

Among all its competitors, the "Euchre Deck" has probably achieved the greatest notoriety during the latter days of Deadwood, for being a den of games and gamblers.

These latter sharps, of whom the "Euchre Deck" establishment had a host, were generally leagued together, and it was rarely that a "fat" customer entered the place and came out with a cent in his pocket. It was also a stand at which pickpockets held forth; so that, between the two evils, the "tender-foot" was doomed to be relieved of his wealth, unless he showed evidence of being an ugly customer, and was an expert at handling one of those deadly instruments known as the revolver—which, by the way, is the best friend a man can have in the mines.

The "Euchre Deck" was a favorite resort of Mr. Ralph Lamont, who, it will be remembered, was proud in calling himself the dutiful step-son of the man of millions, Munro Malvern.

Every night, and often the whole of the days, found the spendthrift within the gambling establishment, either watching the games or taking a hand. When he was so fortunate as to have extorted a sum of money from his step-father, he played until he had lost every farthing; then he was a spectator, until he could obtain another gift, or could induce somebody to lend him a sum.

This was seldom, however. There was hardly a man in the place whom he had not borrowed from, but never had he met his obligations.

To-night, again, he was penniless, having lost the last dollar of the money he had taken from Malvern's library, in consideration for services rendered, as hitherto mentioned. Not a penny had he left, and the game of chance seemed more alluring than ever, now that he had no ready cash to invest.

Indeed, the scene within the "Euchre Deck" was rather imposing, even though it was a place of gambling.

It was one vast apartment, with rough walls, and lit by lamp-chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. The floor was dotted with tables, with a bar at one end; and gathered in this scene were both males and females—for the latter take the precedence as gamblers in Deadwood; the red-shirted miner, just out of the mines; the gentleman of leisure, who ten times out of twelve is a pick-pocket; the bullying rough; and all phases of human character peculiar to the Western mines.

Among the women who nightly were the habitués of the "Euchre Deck," there were many who were handsome, elegantly dressed, and probably not of shameless repute, except they were drawn to the board by the fascinations and allurements attendant upon high gambling and betting.

Most unfortunately for Mr. Ralph Lamont, these

fair votaries of the games of chance had had their experience with him, and would no longer notice or play with him, unless they were morally certain he had a fat pocket-book. And, altogether, the dutiful step-son of Munro Malvern was down in luck, to-night, likewise, very much "down in the mouth," and thirsty at that.

"Not a red cent!" he mused, as he dove for the twentieth time into his pockets, to find them empty. "Dash it—the same old, old story—*but*! I wonder if the governor hasn't got some more forgery for me to execute—some love-letters for me to indite? Not a show for me here, to-night, without wealth—not a single smell, by Jove! They all know me. That's the deuce of being notoriously popular in the fine art of borrowing and never paying your dues. Confound it, and how I would like to rub my stomach against a sherry cobbler. See the black-hearted ingrates pour down the sparkling spirit, without tendering me the use of their empty glasses to smell of even! That would be more satisfaction than standing here looking on. Hello! who is this? Perhaps a new one, who does not know me. Jove! and she is as beautiful as a grizzly cub six months after birth!"

He gazed, as he uttered these latter words, at a female who had just entered the "Euchre Deck," and was sauntering toward him—a young woman, evidently not yet out of her teens, and, as he had remarked, very pretty, in a Spanish-Mexican costume, with short skirt, and fancifully beaded leggings.

As she sauntered along, a pair of piercing black eyes swept the scene at a glance, and finally rested upon Lamont, who was the only one, perhaps, in the whole room who noticed her, so devoted were the spectators and players to the games, which were at the height of their interest.

Approaching Lamont, the Pistol Queen, for it was she, smiled sweetly, although there was a burning fire in her eyes which the spendthrift failed to notice.

"Do you play cards, señor?" Bel Helene asked, with a glance toward a table which was just being vacated.

"Why!—well—that is—yes!" Lamont stammered, as the horrifying thought of his empty pockets rushed upon him—and here was a chance to spend an hour with one of the prettiest women that had ever graced the "Euchre Deck." "But, you—you perceive, my dear lady, I am N. G.—D. B.—B. B. T.—that is to say, busted by thunder!"

"Ha! ha! dead broke, eh? Well, that will make no difference, as long as I am blessed with a plenty. Besides, you may be able to serve me in a way that will repay. Come! before the table is taken, for there are others standing ready."

Highly pleased, the dutiful step-son of Munro Malvern followed his strange acquaintance, and soon they were seated at the table, with a bottle of fine wine between them, engaged in the popular game of the mines—poker.

"Drink and be merry, Mr. Lamont!" the Pistol Queen said, merrily. "We will have another game—then I want you to oblige me with a little information."

"Ask me any thing in this wide world, my dear creature, and I will answer with the greatest pleasure!" Lamont assured, graciously, for his spirits were becoming more buoyant the faster he imbibed the bottled spirits.

The game was soon played through, and by that time the spendthrift was just boozey enough to be communicative. Bel Helene had been watching him narrowly all the while, and an expression of triumph shot into her eyes now, as she saw that her time for playing had arrived.

"Listen to me!" she said, bending forward toward him, and enchaining his gaze—"listen to me: I am in search of a man; I believe him to be here in Deadwood. Perhaps you can tell me of him. Did you, sir, ever hear of a man whose name was Sanderson—Garry Sanderson?"

"Pshaw!" Lamont gasped, leaning back with a drunken chuckle. "I guess you've pretty near struck the first time, my beauty. Garry Sanderson? Why, that's the very name my old Unky used to travel under, sure! I'm in a champagne bottle!"

"Your Unky?" Bel Helene half whispered, leaning further toward him, her features working with emotion, and her hands clenching until the nails cut into the flesh. "You must tell me of him! Who is this man you call 'Unky'?"

"My dear creature, he is my beloved step-father, from whom I occasionally make a spec, when I am hard-up for cash."

"And his name—his name?"

"Pshaw! Must be a stranger here, eh? especially if you don't know the cognominous appellation of my representative—aw—my business-manager, you see—Munro Malvern, ma'am."

"And this is the man who once traveled through the West under the name of Garry Sanderson?" the Pistol Queen asked, nervously.

"The very same old nabob!" Lamont assured, emptying the bottle to the last drop. "Ye see, he's got up in the world some, since then, and assumed his genuine name!"

"Then, Malvern is his name, eh?—his real name by birthright?"

"So far as I know, it is!"

"And this is the man, then, whom I seek—the wretch whose life I have hunted so long!" the girl muttered, under her breath. "Oh! father, I am close upon his trail, and you shall have avenged!"

Then, aloud, she addressed Lamont once more.

"I must get into Munro Malvern's house—I must, I say; nothing but death can stop me. You are familiar with the place—you must tell me how I can get in!"

"My beloved creature—anything to accommodate

you. Bring me another bottle of the glorious spirit with which you have enthused me, and I will surrender unto you my night-key, which will admit you into the palatial mansion of my governor!"

Bel Helene did not wait for deliberation—she knew the bargain was to insure the success of her plans.

She ordered and paid for the wine; then receiving the keys from Lamont, and leaving him to make a night of it, she hurried out into the gulch.

Now, Munro Malvern—now, Garry Sanderson, the hour of my vengeance has arrived!"

CHAPTER VII.

A WARNING—A CRIME—AN ARREST.

"GREAT spirit uv old Methus'ler! they do say thet we aire goin' ter hev an actooal resurrection o' ther days o' thet cuss, Deadwood Dick, wi' thes galoot, Nugget Ned, whom ther paper's blowin' so much about, fer ther chief center-pole ter ther pavillion o' vice an' road-agency. Neow, in the legal opinyun uv ther court, of whom I, Colonel William Henry Harrison Stokes, ar' an annointed an' reverend representative—a beautiful model of the great colossal statue o' justice—thes bizness order be nipped in ther bud. In the revised statuary o' ther latest improved laws o' ther city o' Deadwood, it ar' laid down thet road-agency consists o' a band o' masked galoots, bizness unknown, who cavort thru' ther labyrinthian recesses, an' crooks an' crannies uv a mountain deestrick, fer ther purpuss o' pillage an' plunder, an' ter intimidate widders an' children, an' scare old-maids out o' ther growth which nature demands, wi' ther advance o' years. Them's ther laws; an' thet ther offense ar' punishable six feet above terra-firma, wi' a stout limb an' a hemp cravat fer ther acting judge. Now, then, I say, swing up this new road-agent, as an example ter ther world."

"Who knows fer sartin, colonel, thet Nugget Ned and his knights are road-agents?" ventured Baltimore Bess—for the scene was in the "Little Brown Jug," with the usual characters that frequented the place. "Et hain't been proved thet they hev committed any depredations of a lawless turn."

"Ah! Bess, gal, ye don't understand ther intricacies o' ther great rejuvenated laws o' ther United States o' Ameriky. In ther natteral course o' human events, et becomes us as a populace ter keep an eye on everybody, and if the breeze wafts one suspicion, ter grab et an' freeze ter et like grim death ter a nigger. By the sweat o' yer brow work ther suspicion inter a tangible shape, until et assumes ther dimensions uv a certainty; ef ye lack a few p'int, add 'em in yerself; superfluous padding is fat fer ther printer, an' he rejoiceth thereat. Spare no efforts to add to, and, in due time, you will have a case before ye, an' will hev laid ther foundation uv yer success as a star in the firmament o' legal jurisdiction!"

"Yaw! dat ish so!" assented Judge Jacob, with a wise shake of his head. "Der colonel ish right, so drue as I ish der sludge mit der court!"

"So you would condemn this Nugget Ned as a road-agent, eh, without a single proof?" Baltimore Bess asked, as she lit a fresh cigarette.

"Bess, gal, ye shed not ask ter kno' ther secrets o' ther Blackstone profession. There are various intricate complications of ther law, which we are, as a firm, compelled ter lock within our individual bosoms, and which can only be extracted therefrom by the turning of a monetary key."

"Ha! ha! so that is your game, eh? You banter for prices in your profession, you old rascal."

"Exactly, Bess—as I am a beautiful specimen o' manhood."

"Ha! ha! such a beauty! But, here comes a stranger—pshaw!"

All eyes were involuntarily turned upon a man who had just entered through the open door—a straight, wiry figure, of medium height, clad in the costume of a mountain ranger, while over the upper part of his face he wore a black mask.

He stood for a moment and glanced about the room, as if in search of some one; then, turning suddenly, he left the saloon without a word.

"Sh!" Baltimore Bess said, "there is the man you would condemn, colonel; that was Nugget Ned!"

"Ethereal spirit of old Methus'ler!" gasped the "beauty of the mines," in great surprise. "War that the galoot who knows so much and yet says so little? Is that the road rider, whom it is ther intention o' ther committee on elevation ter hang, at first opportunity?"

"The same chap!" affirmed Bess.

"Ther identical galoot!" chimed in Kentucky Jack, from his perch behind the bar.

"I pet my life he was one tough tuyfel ter handle!" from Dutch Jake.

"Sh!" Bess said again. "Don't you hear the tramp of horses' feet, outside? Something is going ter happen. Keep still! I'll plug ther first galoot as motions for a weepion—that's me, Baltimore Bess. Ah! here comes the knight, again."

True! Nugget Ned again stepped inside the saloon, and glanced around, once more. Seeing no weapons drawn, he advanced, with a sheet of paper of large size, and with the butt of a revolver, tacked it to the wall.

Then, with a low bow, to each of the puzzled spectators, he slowly retreated to the door, and bowed himself out into the darkness of the night.

A moment later, hoof-strokes were heard rapidly receding.

"Pshaw!" Baltimore Bess said, after the strange visitor was gone. "He war jest as cool as a frozen cucumber, you bet! An' looker thar, pilgrims, at w'at he has tacked to the wall—a notice!"

"Read it, Bess, gal!" grunted the colonel, with a sigh. "Sunhow, I never ked get thet dratted mess

o' language fixed in my mind so thet I ked read. In ther early cultyvation o' my beauty, my sire fergot ter add in readin' an' spellin' wi' my accomplishments!"

"Listen, then!" the girl said, as she gazed at the writing upon the poster.

"Here is w'at the galoot sez:

"DEADWOOD, July —, 187—.

"To all whom it may concern:

"Whereas, the authorities of Deadwood and the surrounding districts have branded Nugget Ned and his knights as road-agents, they had best look out that innocent men are not drawn into a life of outlawry, which would terminate disastrously for those who would be the oppressors. The knights aim to harm none but those who would harm them, but they should not be crowded upon!"

"NUGGET NED."

Bel Helene, after leaving the saloon where she had so successfully inveigled Ralph Lamont into her plans, hurried through the street, until she came to a place where the buildings were few and scattering.

Further on, the mansion of Munro Malvern stood, almost isolated from neighbors, and looking imposing compared with the rude shanties which made up the popular mining town or city.

Stopping in the shadow of an unoccupied building, the Pistol Queen glanced about her to see that she was not observed, after which she gazed narrowly at the mansion of the man she hated with an intense, deadly rancor.

"There is no light!" she muttered, cautiously. "Perhaps he is not at home; or is he in bed? Ha! ha! it would be a capital place to surprise him. Curse him! how I hate him! How I yearn to do what I swore to do in retaliation! Murder! ugh! I shudder at the sound of the word; yet he did not hesitate to murder the father, or worse than murder the daughter. Why should I hesitate to avenge my wrongs? I will not hesitate! My game that I have hunted so long shall not now escape me—I swear it!"

She glided forward, with a strange fury glowing in her eyes—an expression upon her features that it is not good to see upon the face of a woman or girl.

That portion of the gulch street was deserted, as the main populace had long since concentrated further down the gulch, where the stores, saloons and dens were located.

She approached the house like one upon some dark mission, glancing sharply about as if expecting a surprise from some hidden foe.

Softly she crept up the steps, and fitted the night-key into the latch. Then she listened!

All was silent within. It was near the midnight hour; probably the inmates were asleep.

She waited a moment, then unlocked the door and came face to face with Munro Malvern!

She started back with a little scream, and her hand flew into the folds of her dress.

But the mine-owner was too quick for her. With a savage oath he cocked a pistol which he held in his hand, and fired full into her breast.

She threw up her arms with a gasp, and would have fallen, but he sprang forward—caught her—dragged her out into the street.

"My God! another murder upon your soul, Munro Malvern!" the gilty man gasped, in a horrified whisper, as he saw the blood spurt from the wound, when he dropped the body upon the ground. "And her, too? Bah! Why shudder? She was coming to murder me, and I simply was lucky enough to get my hand in first. She swore she would trail me, and she was true to her promise. Poor girl! She is out of her misery, and I have one foe less. Hark! I hear a footstep—I must get back into the house and—"

Without completing his sentence the murderer dropped the weapon with which he had committed the crime, and slunk back into the mansion, closing the door softly after him.

A few seconds later a man came striding along, whistling merrily, and he nearly stumbled over the body, which was lying in the center of the road.

"Hello! the Dickens! here's somebody down—either dead or dead drunk. A woman, too! Ha! here is blood! She is dead. Who could have done this job?"

And Rosebud Rob, the Sport—for it was he—shuddered, as he gazed at the ghastly spectacle lying in the silvery flood of moonlight.

"Ha! by Heaven! it is the same young woman that I saw at the Jardin Mabille, whom they called Bel Helene! This is a bit of foul play—and directly in front of the mansion of Munro Malvern! Could he have done it? No! his house is dark. Ah! here is a revolver which the assassin has left behind him!"

Espying the weapon the Sport picked it up out of the dust, and wiping it off, proceeded to examine it in the moonlight which flooded over into the gulch from the mountain-tops, where tall naked pines stood like ghostly witnesses to the crime which had just been committed. Failing to find anything peculiar about the weapon, except that it was handsomely finished, Rosebud Rob once more bent over the murdered girl.

"She is quite dead!" he muttered, awed by the ghastly sight—"dead, never more to return to life!"

"And, sir murderer, you are my prisoner!" cried a voice close at hand, and several hands were laid heavily upon the Sport.

"What?" he gasped, wheeling out of their grasp with a lightning movement. "You accuse me of this dastardly crime? Stand back! The man who moves an inch will cause me to do murder in earnest!"

And the Sport's hands held a pair of cocked revolvers, which he had drawn and leveled at his accusers, who comprised the sheriff, George Shelby, and a half dozen others, who had been attracted to the spot by the pistol report.

So rapid had been the Sport's move that he was upon the defensive seemingly in an instant.

"Do you deny that you killed this woman?" Shelby demanded, incredulously—for he was a man who believed in giving every dog a chance, before punishing him. "Do you deny that you fired the shot? Why, we found you with the revolver in your hand!"

"Exactly! I came along, a few seconds after the work had been done, and nearly stumbled over the body. Noticing the revolver lying in the road, I naturally picked it up—just before you came upon me to accuse me of the crime," Rosebud Rob replied, calmly.

"That story, though plausible, will hardly prove satisfactory, sir, and we are in duty bound to arrest you!" Shelby replied, sternly.

"You do so, at the peril of your lives then!" Rosebud Rob cried, keeping his revolvers leveled upon them. "I did not do the deed; I'll fight before I'll suffer arrest!"

"Ha! what means this parleying over the arrest of a murderer, Sheriff Shelby?" cried an authoritative voice, and Munro Malvern, attired only in his pantaloons and shirt, stepped out of his mansion into the street. "He is a murderer and shall be hung for his crime. Arrest him, I say, at once!"

"But, he denies the crime, sir!" the sheriff replied, scarcely knowing what to do, with the pair of revolvers in Rosebud Rob's hands leveled at him.

"Denies it?" cried the mine-owner, with a cool, cynical laugh. "Why, I was looking out of the window, and saw him shoot the woman."

"That settles it," Shelby decided, sternly. "Sir, will you surrender, or must we take you?"

"I will surrender!" Rosebud Rob said, grimly. "This man, Munro Malvern, is the bitterest enemy I have in the wide world, and he has taken this opportunity to strike me this blow. I thank you, Munro Malvern, for manifesting such an interest in my welfare. You laugh now, but he laughs best who laughs last. That will be I. Though you have put a crime upon my shoulders, which no doubt was committed by yourself, you will find me game to the last. Ha! ha! Do you remember that little story I related to you about the good Samaritan of my younger days? Well, go you into your home, and ponder over it, and turn over in your mind the name of Carrolton—Leslie and Lotta Carrolton! Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Sheriff, I am yours truly!"

And throwing down his revolvers, the Sport allowed the officer to handcuff and hurry him away to the jail.

While Munro Malvern turned and re-entered the mansion, like one just recovering from a blow.

"Ten thousand furies take the Dandy Sport!" he gasped, hurrying to the library, and gulping down a glass of brandy. "How much does he know about the Carrolton affair? Has he any proofs, curse him? If so, he can put my neck in a noose. I must find out. Ha! the devil! the revolver that bears the name of Munro Malvern, upon the belt, was the one I used, and carelessly hurled down, where some passer-by should pick it up. Curse me for an idiot! I must regain possession of it, or the heir to the Big Bullion mine is a free man, and I am doomed!"

Pulling on his boots and coat, he once more descended into the street, to search for the weapon.

At the time of his entering the mansion, a crowd had been gathering about the body of the Pistol Queen, out of curiosity, and the report that the Dandy, Rosebud Rob, had shot her, created no little sensation.

"I don't believe a word of it!" Baltimore Bess said, as she pushed forward, and gazed at the dead girl, "an' hayr's what don't keer who knows it. That Sport warn't one o' ther kind ter war ag'in' wimmin, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"It's a dratted shame!" allowed Colonel Bill, limping forward. "I'll sell out their hull o' my beauty if I don't b'lieve thar's shennagin' here—that's me, Bill Stokes, attorney and counselor-at-law!"

"Pick up ther poor gal an' fetch her to my cabin!" a miner said. "She can't lay here in the street."

Accordingly the lifeless body was raised and borne down the gulch, followed by the curious crowd.

One man lingered behind the rest, long enough to pick up the hitherto unnoticed revolvers of Rosebud Rob, and the one that had been the executioner of Bel Helene.

"These may be of use!" he muttered, then he joined the crowd and was lost from view.

So that when, a few moments later, Munro Malvern descended into the gulch street, he failed to find the tell-tale token of his crime.

"Curse on my idiotic head!" he swore, when a careful search revealed not the weapon. "Some wretch has picked it up and carried it off. Doubtless some thieving rough whose only idea was in securing the weapon for its value. By heaven! I hope 'tis no worse. The net of complications in villainy is drawing around me. I must sit down and reflect!"

Returning to his library, he poured out and swallowed another brimming glass of brandy, after which he threw himself into a chair.

"The business demands consideration from all points!" he muttered. "Here are two heirs to the Big Bullion mine, whom I may regard as strictly dangerous—the girl, Jessie Mapleton, and the Sport, Rosebud Rob. Both are undeniably the children of Robert Mapleton, whom I decoyed and—but, never mind what I did with him. The Sport is in prison, for murder. That is good. How easily I put the crime off upon him! And he must swing if I've mo-

ney enough to bribe witnesses, and I think I have! For instance, I must post the darkey servant, Brass, with what he is to do, for he has served me many a turn, and I can trust him!"

And acting upon the resolve, he touched a call-bell, and the colored man-servant entered, with a bow.

He was a strapping fellow, with a round fat face as black as jet, and eyes, the whites of which were particularly addicted to rolling. But, in his suit of blue, and brass buttons, he made a genteel looking servitor.

"You call me, Mister Malvern?"

"Yes, Brass. Come here and sit down. Have a cigar, and a glass of brandy."

Brass, alias Caesar Ulysses Skeyter, made haste to accept. It was not often he was invited to share such honors. He made a dive at the brandy, first, and glued the mouth of the bottle to his lips, after which there was a suspicious gurgling.

"Hold on, Brass," the mine-owner said, seizing him by the arm. "Leave a little for Charity!"

"Who's Charity?" Brass demanded, reluctantly setting down the bottle. "Fo' sure, dat's bad whiskey."

"Very bad, Brass! But, sit down. I wanted to speak with you. Did you hear or see anything of what happened, to-night?"

"Guess so!" was the reply from behind a cloud of cigar smoke.

"You saw me shoot the girl?"

"Guess so!"

"And palm off the crime upon the Sport who has been here several times?"

"Guess I did."

"Well, that man is my enemy, and must die. He will have a trial, and you must swear that you heard a shriek, and looked out of your window just in time to see the prisoner shoot the girl. Do you hear?"

"Guess so!"

"Brass, how much do I pay you for serving me? Twelve dollars a month, is it not?"

"Guess dem's the perzac figgers, sah!"

"Well, now listen. If you will swear as I have directed, I will increase your pay to twenty-five dollars a month. Do you understand?"

"Guess so!"

"Very well. Take that bottle of brandy, you rascal, and clear out of my sight!"

With a grin of delight the servant obeyed.

"Ha! ha!" the scheming villain laughed. "There is one man I can depend on. That darkey is as sharp as a razor, and as true as steel to my interests. I'd stake my life on him!"

In the lower hall, as he was skurrying along, Brass was suddenly seized by the shoulder and whirled around to confront a stranger, in whose hand was a cocked revolver—a man attired in black, with a mask upon his face, and a hat slouched down over his forehead.

"Hist!" he cautioned, as the darkey suddenly began to quake and tremble; "not a word, or you're a dead nigger. Listen! There is a devilish plot afoot to destroy Rosebud Rob. I just overheard your promises to your master. You must not keep them. I'll cut your black heart out before you shall. You must swear that you saw Munro Malvern shoot the girl. Here is a purse of money, and remember, if you do not swear for Rosebud Rob, you shall not live a day after you leave the court-room. I swear it, as sure as my name is Nugget Ned!"

Then, suddenly throwing a handful of pepper in the astonished negro's eyes, the Knight of the Gulch softly raised a window in a neighboring room, and dexterously dropped out into the night.

In ten minutes he was far from the location of the house of Munro Malvern.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARRESTED—SHELBY GOES BAIL.

HICKORY HANK, the border ruffian, did not always attend to his business punctually, but generally had a drunk of it while his money lasted, when he would "lay for" some other job to replenish his wallet.

Therefore, he did not attend to the case given into his charge by Munro Malvern, until the morning after the midnight arrest of Rosebud Rob.

Pretty Jessie Mapleton, the proprietress of the Acme Laundry—of which she was also the acting worker—was just finishing an early ironing, when she heard a hum of voices outside her shanty, and the next minute Sheriff Shelby, followed by Hickory Hank and his gang, burst into the little kitchen.

"Hooray!" Grim ejaculated, as his greedy, wolfish eyes rested upon the startled maiden; "thar's the gal, sheriff—ther very indentecal gal we want. Ha! ha! ha!"

Trained to do his bidding, the ruffian's pals also laughed.

"Hold on!" Shelby said, pushing Grim back. "You let me manage this matter, please. I am the sheriff, not you. The young lady cannot be arrested until we prove that she has the money in her possession."

"The money!" gasped Jessie, stepping back, her face paling. "What do you mean, sir?"

"We mean, my purty, thet we've cum fer the money you stole from Mister Malvern, a few days ago!" Hickory Hank leered, triumphantly. "Ye needn't put on any airs, ner play any gum games, fer 'tain't no use. Me an' my pard's heer see'd ye stupefy ther guv'nor with drink, and then steal a package out o' his pockets. We see'd thet, you bet, an' we'll swar ter et on a pack o' Bibles higher then Grizzly Peak—we will!"

"My God! what vile conspiracy is this!" the astounded girl gasped, sinking upon a chair, her face now colorless. "Is this the way my foe has taken to strike me?"

"You will excuse me, ma'am," Shelby said, hurl-

ing Grim back again; "but it is a very unpleasant duty which brings me here. A warrant has been issued by Mr. Munro Malvern, and placed in my hands by Hickory Hank, charging you with theft, and necessitating your arrest if the money can be found."

"Oh! sir, this is a vile plot to ruin me!" Jessie cried, bursting into tears. "I did not steal Mr. Malvern's money; he gave it to me as my share—"

"Too thin, me purty!" chuckled Grim, evilly. "Ye ken't make sassyfras bark go down a coon's throat, ner ye ken't twist out o' yer crimes nohow nuther. Hayr's myself, Hank Clay Grim, E-s-q., an' thar's my pards, Hayseed Jim, Popular Pete, an' Holy Moses—the latter bein' a clergyman but recently retired from the pulpit. Now, we are all good law-abiding citizens, you bet yer boots, an' we do solemnly swar an' asseverate that we did see ye steal a package o' money from the pockets o' Munro Malvern, arter ye hed got him drugged on drugged lemonade or something or other."

"Liar, base wretch!" Jessie cried, indignantly. "You are paid for this work. Go on, Mr. Shelby, and do your duty. I have said all that is necessary."

"Yas, go on, sheriff," Grim urged, with a diabolical leer. "S'arch every nook an' cranny, an' ef ye don't find a thousand dollar's worth o' greenbacks my name ain't an honor ter the town o' Deadwood—that's all."

Shelby obeyed. It was his duty to believe no one, as an officer, without proof, yet he could not bring himself to believe that this fair, pure girl could be what she was accused of being—a thief.

He went carefully over the room, and examined everything that could contain the alleged stolen money; but he failed to find it.

Jessie, unable to utter a word, so overwhelming was her horror, sat half crouching upon the chair, and watched him with wildly-staring eyes.

"Better s'arch the gal," Hickory Hank suggested, with a grin. "Ten ter one she's got the rhino stored away among her clothin'!"

"No need o' thet," interposed Holy Moses, rising from a search under the carpet. "Heer's ther money, now."

A scream—a fall from the chair—Jessie had fainted!

"You deserve arrest more than she does, Grim!" Sheriff Shelby said, angrily. "Give me the money; then go send me a carriage. You have no further action in this case at present."

Hickory Hank bowed, and, after Holy Moses had delivered up the package of money, the roughs all took their departure, Grim promising to send a vehicle.

After they were gone George Shelby set to work, and, in the course of a few moments, had Jessie restored to consciousness.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Mapleton," he said, as Jessie opened her eyes with a convulsive shudder.

"Grim and his men have gone, and there is no one to annoy you, unless it is me, and I trust I may arrange so as not to annoy you."

"But—oh! sir, they found the money!"

"Yes, it was found. Which was bad, under the circumstances, as your prosecutor, Mr. Malvern, is a rich, and, in one sense, an influential man. But, though I am an officer of the law, I believe there is some little villainy here, and I promise you that I shall not desert you. I have been sheriff in Deadwood long enough to learn some points, and you shall have the advantage of them. Will you be kind enough to tell me how you came in possession of this money, which Munro Malvern claims was stolen from him, by you?"

"Oh! yes, sir, and if you only believe me, I shall not feel utterly friendless!" Jessie cried, eagerly; and then, she related all that is known to the reader concerning the letter brought to her by Ralph Lamont; the visit of Munro Malvern, and also some items of her previous life back to the date when her father had mysteriously disappeared.

Shelby listened intently, and occasionally jotted down something in his note-book. He seemed deeply interested.

"I have heard you!" he said, when she had completed her narrative, "and you can rest assured I shall take a lively interest in looking into this case. There is some strongly romantic points in this case, and also some chances for a villain to put in his schemes!"

"And must you arrest me?"

"Yes, that is my duty, as the money was found in your possession. But, all that is necessary for you to do, is to come with me to the office of the attorney-judge, who has charge of such cases, and I will procure your bail, so that you are free until you are summoned to appear on trial."

"Oh! sir, you will do this, and save me the disgrace of imprisonment?"

"Certainly, dear lady, and as much more for you as I can."

"Oh! thank you! thank you! Your kindness I shall never forget!"

"Never mind that, ma'am. As my time is not my own, if you will oblige me by coming with me—"

"Oh! yes. I will get my hat, and be ready in a moment. With such a protector as you, sir, I shall not fear to face my enemy!"

And rising, she hastened to attire herself for the street.

George Shelby watched her narrowly as her back was turned.

"I never knew there were women in this rough city who possessed so many personal attractions!" he muttered, an admiring light in his eyes. "She is graceful, pretty, intelligent—three indispensable qualities in a woman. Moreover, she is a victim of a conspiracy, it is evident, which makes her ad-

ditionally interesting. And if I don't do her justice, if there is such a word as justice, may I be lynched for a horse thief! Malvern, millionaire, or no Malvern, they are my sentiments! Ah! ready, ma'am?"

"Quite ready, sir," Jessie replied, tying on a coquettish straw-hat.

"And I think I have mustered up enough courage even to face Munro Malvern!"

"The meeting with him need not necessarily demand any great courage, as I should advise you not to address him at all," Shelby replied, as they left the cabin, entered the carriage, and proceeded up the thronged main street.

The seat of justice in Deadwood was then (and undoubtedly is, yet) in a large room of a building near the center of the town, the upper story of which building was used as offices of so-styled lawyers who had flocked into the mines.

But as it happened, the firm of Stokes and Schriner was the most popular, inasmuch as the latter had been elected judge of such courts as were inaugurated in the mining city.

A crowd of curious individuals were hanging about the doors, as Shelby and Jessie entered the courtroom. Inside, as the poor girl had anticipated, were gathered Hickory Hank, his pals, and Munro Malvern.

A triumphant expression was upon the mine-owner's face, as he saw the girl who had refused to recognize his greatness, called up on a charge of theft. But it cut him, when he could not even catch a glance of her eye.

Judge Jacob occupied a seat behind a high pulpit-like contrivance, over which just his head could be seen.

Colonel Bill Stokes sat close at hand, his bald pate shining like a full moon. Adolphus Cole, recording clerk, occupied another conspicuous position. Several other legal aspirants were gathered around.

"Hello! vat haff you got dere, sheriff?" the judge demanded, bouncing to his feet, on Shelby's entrance.

"A young lady, your Honor!" Shelby responded, leading Jessie forward.

"Von young lady, clerk; register her!" commanded the judge.

"Sheriff, vat ish der charges mit dis young vimmens?"

"She is charged with theft, your Honor!"

"Clerk, wride 'im down. Sheriff, vat did der young voomans steal?"

"She is charged with stealing a package of money amounting to one thousand dollars."

"Clerk, wride 'im down. Sheriff, who from did dish girl stole der money?"

"From me!" said Munro Malvern, stepping forward.

"You lie!" Jessie cried, indignantly—"you lie, you scheming villain!"

"Clerk, put dot down. Sheriff, der drial is postponed until der-morrow at swi' o'clock. In der meandime, der young vimmens ish committed mit der shail in default of—"

"Hold! the young lady shall not go to jail, for I will go her bail in any sum the court may see fit to name!" cried Sheriff Shelby, stepping forward.

"Curse you, man—what do you mean!" the mine-owner hissed in a rage. "The girl shall go to—"

"Der court accepts von 'tousand dollars bail!" yelled Schriner from his judicial pulpit. "Der girl ish free—der court ish dismissed ten minutes fer refreshments!"

Shelby turned upon the mine-owner fiercely.

"You will find that Miss Mapleton has a friend in me, Mr. Munro Malvern!" he said. "Though you are a man of millions I do not fear you. Oh! no!"

"Mr. Sheriff, youst arrest dot man for contempt mit der court, by swearin'. I fine him five tollars."

"Keep off!" Malvern gritted, as the sheriff moved toward him. "Here," and he threw a half eagle upon the floor. "I could buy off a hundred such courts!" and with an ugly laugh he wheeled and left the courtroom.

"Shimminy Shackson! vot a vool I vas not ter say ten dollars!" grunted the judge, as he descended to the floor to secure the gold piece.

"Shentleman, all, I pid you adieu. I have to go see a man up der street!"

Shelby turned to Jessie with a smile.

"Your prosecutor evidently left us in a savage mood, Miss Mapleton. Shall I see you home?"

"As you please, Mr. Shelby. I am not afraid to go alone."

"Then, I must beg to excuse myself on the plea of business. I will secure you good counsel, and call for you at two to-morrow."

Jessie bowed, and then left the place to seek her own shanty home.

After she had gone, Shelby turned to Colonel Bill Stokes, who had all this while been a silent spectator.

"Well, colonel, you have heard the case. Money was found in the young lady's place of residence, which Munro Malvern is ready to swear was stolen from him; and also proposes to put up Hickory Hank and gang as witnesses. What do you think about it?"

"I think it's a gum-game—sure's my name is Bill Stokes!" the colonel replied, slapping his knee, enthusiastically. "The gal's no more a thief than you or I. I uster know old Bobby Mapleton, an' he warn't ther daddy o' no light-fingers, you bet!"

"What did you know about the affairs of Mr. Mapleton, previous to his disappearance?"

"Very little, sir, because, ye see, I warn't in town much, them days. I know thet he war in partnership in a small pan-claim, wi' thes Malvern. He also owned a parcel o' land, whar the Big Bullion mine ar' located. It war considered

worthless, then, an' it seems that Malvern claims to have bought it of Mapleton for a song."

"Ah! ten chances to one that Malvern's claim is fraudulent. Who owned the parcel of ground, previous to this man, Mapleton?"

"A galoot who lives up at Duck-Tail gulch. His name is Hartley!"

"Did Mapleton have any particular friend, in whom he reposed confidence?"

"None thet I know on. He warn't much o' a galoot fer social spees, an' didn't have many intimates. He seemed sorter sober, like as if he war al-lus cogitatin' over sum deep sorer."

"I'd give a good deal to find out who knows whether or not Munro Malvern is the rightful owner of the Big Bullion mine!" Shelby said, as he turned to go.

"By the way, will you defend the girl's case, colonel? I'll foot the bill, and if you free her I'll make it well worth your while."

"Then, ye ken count on me, sheriff—great speerit uv old Methus'ler, yes. Ef thar's enuff p'int in ther hull legal judasprudence, thet ar' gal shall be cleared, I swar ter et, as s'ave as I am the acknowledged beauty o' ther mines, an' hev a gold medal fer ther same."

Shelby bowed and left the seat of justice in deep thought.

"I take an interest in this young woman's welfare; I shall work for her. My first move will be to visit this man Hartley, of Duck-Tail gulch," he said.

The Deadwood jail, known as the "castle," was built of stone, and was as creditable an affair in appearance as any within the magic city.

There were several cells on each side of a corridor, on the upper floor, the ground apartments being devoted to the uses of a grocery store.

The entrance to the cells was by a stone stair-case, and up these steps Rosebud Rob had been led to his confinement.

The number of his cell was "4," and here he had been confined ever since his arrest, only being visited twice a day by an ignorant-looking janitor, who fetched his food.

But this individual could not be induced to talk, and all that was left for the incarcerated Sport was to talk to himself, at times.

It was now the night following the scene in the court-room, and the prisoner sat upon a poorly-constructed stool, gazing moodily at his surroundings.

"I wonder how long I am to remain in this confounded hole yet?" he muttered, as he bowed his head upon his hands. "I've been here long enough to suit my fastidious tastes, I flatter myself. And still no show of release. Ah! and this is the very hour when I should be free, to fight against my ene-my. But, he has played a powerful card against me, and one which bids fair to result in my ultimate suspension above terra firma. Still, I would laugh at this demon, and defy his power, if I could only be free. I'd show him that I did not lie, when I told him I was a man to suit all circumstances. Ha! a noise in the hall, outside! What does it mean?"

"Hist!" exclaimed a low voice. "Do not raise a racket, but keep mum. I am here for your interest."

Then there was a fumbling of metal against iron, as if a key were being tried to a lock.

Rosebud Rob listened a moment, then arose cautiously to his feet, and crept toward the door of his cell, his black eyes piercing the gloom. But, all he was able to discover was a man working at the lock, outside—a man as black as the night itself, with a mask to conceal the features.

"Who in the deuce are you?" the Sport demanded, curiously, for he resolved to know, before allowing the entrance of one who might prove a deadly tool of Munro Malvern.

"Sh! don't make a noise. I am one who has come to release you if we can strike a bargain. I am Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch."

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a low whistle of surprise. He had heard much of the gulch-knight and his night-patrol—had heard them branded as road-agents, and had heard them vindicated by old miners who did not believe in the stories that were floating about.

Nugget Ned was not long in picking the lock, after which he opened the door to the cell and stepped inside.

The Sport and the Knight stood confronting each other.

"Sh!" Nugget Ned said, calmly. "Be seated, pray. I wish to speak a few words with you."

Rosebud Rob obeyed quietly. He was determined to hear the fellow through, at all hazards.

"I have a bull's-eye lantern here, but I dare not deal with light in these close quarters," the Knight continued. "Besides, darkness will answer the same purpose. You are Rosebud Rob, are you not?"

"Exactly."

"Very good. As I stated before, I am Nugget Ned. You have heard of me, no doubt?"

"I have, on several occasions."

"Those who spoke of me endowed me with endearing epithets, no doubt—eh?"

"You have been widely spoken of as a road-agent, sir."

"Ha! ha! they still persist in calling me that. Well, I can scarcely blame them, since they have had a siege of road-agency during the past years. But I am no road-agent, sir, nor am I a robber. For what I came into this country no one knows except myself and He who knows everything. I brought with me a band of men who were eager to enter into the life of a miner. We had not been two weeks in the hills, when we made a discovery that we all took an oath not to reveal to the world for a stipulated time. The discovery necessitated our riding through

the mountains at nocturnal hours. There was a traitor in our midst, and he was the first to circulate the infamous report that we were a band of road-agents. The report has gained such credence, that it would be useless for us to think to vindicate ourselves. There is a spirit working against us—myself in particular—backed by more money than I can muster. This spirit is invested in the flesh of a man—or a human demon who calls himself a man—and he is equally your enemy and mine, for I speak of Munro Malvern, the mine-owner!"

"Hail then I am not alone in my hatred for that devil!" Rosebud Rob exclaimed, fiercely. "Go on, sir."

"Not you are not the only one who hates Munro Malvern. Perhaps I have the best cause to hate him of all his foes. But the whys and wherefores matter little to you. It is enough that he is working dead against you. And he is also working against your sister!"

"My sister?" Rosebud Rob gasped, leaping to his feet. "My sister?"

"Ay! your sister. Were you not aware that you had such a relative, young man?"

"Alas! no. I heard that my little sister Jessie died shortly after I fled from my boyhood home."

"Then you heard wrong. Robert Mapleton brought his daughter with him to the mines, and she is living here in Deadwood since his disappearance a year ago."

"By Heaven! Can this be true? Are you trifling with me, sir, to give me misery?"

"On the contrary, no. Miss Jessie Mapleton is alive, well, and, I may add, the prettiest young lady in the mines!"

"And you say that Munro Malvern is working against her?"

"With all his power. He has had her arrested for theft, but luckily she got bail; I cannot say as yet how the trial will end!"

"And why do you come here to tell me this?" Rosebud Rob demanded, as he arose and paced to and fro, with clenched hands. "I cannot see your object."

"It can easily be explained!" Nugget Ned responded. "I have taken a sudden fancy to your sister. I believe her to be good and true, and just such a woman as would suit me for a wife. If I will release you and work for you, to clear you and her, and establish you as the rightful heirs to the Big Bullion mine, will you give me your sister's hand in marriage, if I first gain her willing consent to a union with myself?"

"No, ten thousand times, no!" Rosebud Rob cried, fiercely. "I will not sacrifice a helpless woman, even to save myself from the hangman's noose. Go! sir, road-agent! Our interview is at an end!"

Nugget Ned bowed, and without a word left the jail, locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

NUGGET NED ABROAD.

THAT honorable member of the Deadwood Bar, Colonel Bill Stokes—the bald-headed beauty of the mines—was on this same night returning from the upper portion of the city, at the midnight hour, where he had been paying his respects to a certain claim-owning "widdler," on whom the gentleman of legal technicalities had cast a matrimonial eye. For the colonel had a particular passion for "widdlers" with a surplus of cash, and as the one in question was never dead broke, and was of a gossiping, convivial nature, the colonel often dropped in to spend an evening.

And it came to pass that, in many instances, when the veteran dispenser of Black Hills jurisprudence vended his way homeward, during the wee sma' hours, he was in a state of happiness that finds expression in bacchanalian song, and while his thoughts wandered aimlessly in the path of melody, his feet and legs were also in the habit of wandering out of a bee-line.

As usual, to-night, the colonel was "full" to overflowing with song and melody, as he zig-zagged along through a portion of the gulch that was not particularly inviting to the ordinary pedestrian, after dark.

The trail was bordered on either side by frowning chaparrals, back of which piled up nearly perpendicularly the jagged mountains, on whose very top-most ridges stood ghostly sentinel pines, which cast their naked shadows far down into the moonlit gulch. This locality, being beyond where there were many dwellings or other habitations, had witnessed many dark crimes, and was regarded as an outlaw ambush.

But, to-night, it had no terrors to Colonel Bill. He was a supremely happy being. Every thing around him seemed to be inoculated with the glorious spell which the "widdler" had cast around him. Even the fat, grinning countenance of the moon, it seemed to the "legal limb," was pregnant with jollification.

And he sung and he sung, until the whole gulch was mocking at him in detonating echoes.

"(Hic) tlier ole gal she sot 'em up scrumpshest—(hic) bet yer boots!" the colonel volunteered, as he paused to gaze up at the moon, "didn't she, (hic) ole fellow? A fine (hic) ole gal ar' that same widdler, an' (hic) I feel like a corn-fed turk—(hic) ay, an' don't ye (hic) forget it, (hic) I say, (hic) ol' feller w'at's your (hic) opin'ion o' (hic) rats? Hey? W-why don't ye speak, (hic) ter yer (hic) middle? Seems to me, (hic) ole feller, you-ser leetle (hic) off color!"

And the colonel shook his fist at the moon, with a sly wink.

"(Hic) Ye ken't shet m-y eye up, ye old Dutch galoot, (hic) fer I know ye, bet yer (hic) boots. That's

thar! (hic) don't stand up thar a-grinnin' (hic), but come erlong w' me, an' (hic) assist me ter shed a widdler's tear!"

"Shut up, you drunken fool! Do you see this?" and, as a masked man suddenly stepped in front of the colonel, the muzzle of a large revolver was thrust under his nose.

But, alas! the good member of the bar had not the power of comprehending very difficult things, and mistaking the glistening deadly tube for the nozzle of one of those glass receptacles from which the innocent toper derives his moisture, a grin of gratitude shot athwart his grotesque features, and with a gracious "thankee," he clasped his lips over the end of the tube with a smack of hugest satisfaction.

But he drew back the next moment, suspiciously, and first eyed the tube, and then the masked man who was holding it in a firm grasp.

"Gone dry, hey?" he queried, with a tipsy leer. "Waal, that is all right!"

And he would have once more turned his attention toward the silvery moon, only that the masked knight seized him rudely by the shoulder and gave him an unceremonious shaking.

"See here, you drunken lout, wake up, or I'll put a bullet through you in quicker time than a cat can sneeze!" the stranger said, and after a series of violent efforts, he succeeded in partially bringing the "beauty of the mines" to his senses.

"W-what the devil (hic) 's the matter w' you?" the colonel gasped. "I hain't got a red cent, ef that's w'at ye're arter, ye galoot!" for he naturally supposed his assailant to be a road-agent, from his being masked.

"I don't want your money, ye old fool!" the knight said, sternly. "I want your blood—your life, unless you promise me what I demand!"

And straight on a level with the colonel's heart came the revolver.

"I promise!" that frightened individual gasped. "I promise, ef ye won't salivate me, pilgrim."

"Very well. What I want is this: There is a prisoner in the Deadwood jail, accused of murder. Do you hear me speaking to you?"

"Ye-s!" Stokes gasped, watching the revolver, suspiciously, and occasionally glancing up at the moon, to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"Well, this man, Rosebud Rob, is innocent, and must not be lynched, or convicted, even. You must act as his attorney and counsel, and you must so twist your tongue into the intricacies of the law as will result in freeing him. Do you hear, sir?"

"You bet yer (hic) boots! Come, let's g-go take a smile."

"No! hold on! Remember you are to free this man, with such proof as I shall be able to furnish you. If you fail, I'll fill your carcass so full of bullets that you'll answer for a first-class soddering-block. Here, lest you may forget my name—Nugget Ned, the Knight of the Gulch—I'll slip a card in your pocket!"

Which the road-agent cleverly did, after which he darted down the gulch.

And fastening his eyes upon the moon, which he still firmly believed to be the Dutch Judge, Colonel Stokes zig-zagged slowly on toward Deadwood, occasionally bursting out into hilarious snatches of song as:

"We shan't go home till mornin',
We shan't go home till mornin',
etc., etc."

The body of Bel Helene, the Pistol Queen, had been taken to the shanty home of one Miles, and assigned a room not occupied by the family, where it was to remain until the trial of the accused murderer, Rosebud Rob.

On this same night, a couple of hours after Nugget Ned's meeting with Colonel Bill, a dark shadow was hovering in the gulch near Miles's cabin.

Now and then you could see the reflection of a man's figure in the spectral moonlight which streamed over the mountain crests; then, for a few moments everything resumed its customary aspect. The town was more quiet than at any time during the twenty-four hours, very few being abroad except in the business part of the main street.

Occasionally a gang of drunken miners would pass out of the town toward their respective claims, making the night hideous with their boisterous songs and shouts. But they soon were out of sight and hearing.

At last the shadow emerges from a growth of pines, and assumes a more tangible shape—the figure of a man.

Stealing, after a sharp glance around him, across a space of moonlight, he finally gained the dark shadow lying before Miles's shanty. Here he paused again and listened, while his sharp eyes, which were visible through a mask, swept the surroundings.

Nobody was in sight; the street was deserted; the shanty was evidently the abode of slumber.

Noting this the prowler gave a satisfied sigh, and stole toward a window which he had previously ascertained opened into the room where the body of the dead girl had been placed.

"They are all asleep inside, and now is my time," he muttered. "I must get into the room where the corpse is, and search for some proof that will add to that which I already have. If I cannot get further proof, it may go hard with the Sport. I must work for him, or my hopes in the direction of Jessie Mapleton can never be realized."

Listening once more to assure himself that there were no other prowlers around than himself, he carefully tried to raise the sash communicating with the dead-room.

Ah! it yielded, and he raised it slowly until it

caught and fastened with a spring. This much of the job was accomplished at least.

His next move was to raise himself upon tip-toes, and peer into the apartment. It was wrapped in deep gloom; he could distinguish no single object. A strange, sickening smell, peculiar to a room in which the dead are kept, blew out into the prowler's face.

"H! that appetizes of the unearthly," he muttered, with a shiver; "but I must not hesitate in this way. I must get in there, and search the clothing worn by the girl at the time of her death. If there is any guilt to be attached to Munro Malvern, curse him! perhaps this search will reveal a clew."

Hesitating no longer he carefully pulled himself upon the window-ledge, and in a moment was inside the room.

Before venturing in search of the body, he lowered the window and also a curtain. He next produced a dark lantern, from which he shot the slide, and a bolt of light sprang out with brilliant distinctness.

And now that the darkness was banished, it was easy to see that the nocturnal prowler was the masked knight, Nugget Ned.

Flashing the light about the room, he perceived the corpse lying upon a blanket on the floor, still robed in the costume worn at the time of the shooting. A pool of blood had coagulated upon the floor, making a ghastly spot.

"Poor girl!" the knight muttered, as he advanced toward the body, "what a pity she had to be cut down so young. Bel Helene they called her—I wonder what her real name was!"

He paused above the corpse, and gazed upon the cold, rigid features with a shiver. A purple hue was upon the face, the jaws had fallen apart, and the eyes were wide open, with a glassy stare.

Setting the lantern upon the floor, Nugget Ned knelt beside the corpse and proceeded to make a hasty search of the clothing. It was a ghastly job at the best, and he was in a mood to linger long in company with a dead body.

Each pocket he examined hastily; then, a thought striking him, he felt in the bosom of the dress.

An exclamation burst from his lips; a newly-written sheet of paper rewarded his search.

Hastily holding it before the light, he read the contents, a deadly glitter gradually stealing into his eyes. It seemed to be part of an unfinished letter in pencil writing, and read:

"DEADWOOD, July—, 187—

"I have found the man I am searching for—the man who ruined me and murdered my father. I am not positive—I saw him to-day, and am *almost* sure 'tis he. They call him Munro Malvern, a-c, he is rich. I will find out, and if it is Garyl Sanderson, my knife shall drink his heart's blood, for he would murder me if he should find that I am here. I will go now and test the matter."

This was all, but it was enough to cause a chuckle from Nugget Ned.

"The very proof that I wanted!" he muttered—"the very proof which must be the means of hanging Munro Malvern where he would have Rosebud Rob hang. Ha! ha! surely but slowly are the tables turning upon this man, whose whole life has been one trail of guilt. The devil has prospered him heretofore, but now—now the old fellow has turned tail and has left his victim in the lurches! Ha! ha!"

Storing the paper in his pocket, the masked knight prepared to leave the dead-room.

Casting a parting glance at the corpse, and then stealing cautiously toward the window, he shot the slide back over the lantern, and all was dark. He was about to roll up the curtain preparatory to raising the window, when he heard a noise that caused him suddenly to become motionless and silent.

There was a sound against the window-pane, as if some person were searching for some place to get a hold whereby to raise the sash.

"Ha! there is some one trying to gain entrance to the room, like myself!" Nugget Ned muttered under his breath.

"Who is it, and what object have they in coming here? Ah! perhaps it is Munro Malvern, coming to remove anything from the body that might throw suspicion upon him. I will get back in the shadow, and see!"

With the stealth of a cat he stole away from the neighborhood of the window, and secreted himself as well as possible behind a bundle of skins which lay in one corner.

The faint noise at the window continued for some time; then the sash was cautiously raised, and a few moments later a man drew himself up and dropped into the room.

"Ah, 'tis darker than the shades of Hades!" he muttered, in a hoarse tone. "I should have brought a lantern, for 'tis accursed spookish business, this searching dead bodies after dark. I will search the body, and hasten to leave the place, all the same."

"Hold! Munro Malvern—you need not go to that trouble," hissed a low, stern voice; then there suddenly shot a bolt of light upon the figure of the mine-owner, and a revolver muzzle was thrust forward directly into his face.

"Hiss! not a word aloud, or I'll blow your brains out."

The millionaire reeled back, with an oath, fraught with terror.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"One who has sworn to bound you down to the death, Munro Malvern, demon that you are!" the Knight of the Gulch replied, in a fierce whisper.

"Start not, curse you! You know me now, for this is not the first time we have met. You know me as Nugget Ned. Not until you stand upon the scaffold for your crimes shall you know the real name of the sleuth who has dogged you for over a year, as persistently as has your half-brother, the devil."

"What do you want?" Malvern gasped, hoarsely. "What are you in this room for? I will raise an alarm!"

"Dare to do it, and I'll blow your brains out, as sure as I am accused of being a road-agent!" Nugget Ned said, viciously. "Go, now, and don't attempt any more of this after-dark villainy, as you will surely be found out. Go! I say, and my revolver will attend your exit!"

With another bitter curse the baffled man turned, and sprang out of the window, with the Knight at his heels.

"You shall pay dearly for this!" he hissed, shaking his clenched fist savagely at this man, who had been a bloodhound upon his trail.

"I fear you not," Nugget Ned replied, calmly. "You are a villain, but a coward, withal, and I regard you in the same light I would a snarling coyote. And it is only a matter of a few hours before I shall take my long contemplated revenge upon you. I shall not commit violence upon your person, nor shall I hire ruffians to kill you—oh! no! I shall stab you so deep with the hand of the law, that you will gladly seek the lynch's noose to rid yourself of your accursed life!"

"Ha! curse you—curse you!" the scheming millionaire gasped, crouching as if he would spring upon his foe—"I defy you. But, by the fends, you shall tell me who you are, under that mask, that you should bear me enmity. You shall tell me, I say, curse you!" and in his rage he sprang toward the Knight of the Gulch, his eyes glaring like those of some infuriated wild beast, and his fingers working convulsively.

But the leveled revolver in the hands of Nugget Ned caused him to shrink back again, while a low laugh escaped the road-knight.

"Ha! ha! you are not so fast as you were!" he muttered, loud enough for the mine-owner to hear. You see that I have the power. I mean to keep it. Tell me, Munro Malvern—know ye of none whom you have wronged that for that they should seek revenge upon you?"

"No! I have done no one wrong that they should thirst for vengeance!" the millionaire replied, savagely.

"Your memory must be at fault, then!" Nugget Ned sneered. "But go! I will cover you with my revolver, as long as you are in sight and range. Go, I say, without another word."

Malvern obeyed. He foresaw that it could do him no good to resist, when the implacable knight had the drop upon him. He accordingly turned with a growl, and strode away down the street. Nugget Ned watched him until he had disappeared from view, then he too left the vicinity, and the night crept on toward the break of another day.

Munro Malvern returned to his own mansion, in a state of almost savage ferocity.

Unexpectedly and to his satisfaction, he found the ruffian, Hickory Hank, making free over wine and cigars, in his library.

"Ah! so you are here, eh?" he demanded. "You are just the man I want for some dirty work. Do you know the fellow they call Nugget Ned—the one who has been accused of road-robbing?"

"Do I know him?" Grim interrogated; "wal, no—I shud say not. I'll allow that 'haln't meenny as hes ther honor o' his acquaintance."

"Well, I want him dropped! You understand; he must not even stir—the bullet must be planted in a sure spot."

"Humph! is the galoot another 'un after the pattern of thet sport ye sicked me at?"

"About the same calibre—if any thing a little cooler, and harder to take!" the plotter replied.

"Then, ye ken let ther job out ter sum one else. I ain't got a partic'lar weakness fer snaggin' myself ac' in corrugated volcanoes—nary a time!"

"Pshaw! you are a fool, Grim. It will be easy enough to drop this customer, by hiding in the bushes, an' layin' fer him, w'en he's about, which is generally after dark. One well-directed bullet is all that is required to do the job."

"How much rhino is thar back o' ther job?"

"Oh! as for that—here!" and the arch-plotter threw down a small roll of bills upon the table.

"There are a hundred dollars, with a promise of more, when you bring me a piece of his ear to assure me that you have executed your work!"

Grim arose with a chuckle.

"Ef I don't drap ther galoot twixt now an' ter-morrow, this time, ye ken count me A. M. S—a miserable shyster. You bet yer boots the galoot's a dead 'un in less no time."

CHAPTER X.

BESS SHOWS HER HAND.

AFTER Grim had gone the millionaire threw himself upon a couch and tried to snatch a few hours of sleep. But it was impossible.

His guilty conscience worked against his desire, and though he closed his eyes no slumber visited him—he was conscious of everything. Memories, and evidently unpleasant ones, came surging back upon him, until at last, just at day-dawn, he leaped to his feet in a state bordering upon desperation.

"Curse it, I am all unstrung!" he muttered, resorting to the brandy bottle for solace. "I never passed such an accursedly wretched night. All the scenes of my life since I was a boy passed in review before my mind's eye. A dozen devils, backed by grinning skeletons of the past, seemed staring at me from every corner of the room. I am as nervous as a cat. I feel like one haunted. The devil has deserted me, and left me to shift for myself. My enemies are multiplying and crowding upon me. Ah! but they shall not win—oh! no, they shall not win. If there is money enough to hang them. Ha! is that

you, Brass? What calls you out of your bed so early?"

"Pardon, mass'r, but a gen'man left a letter fror you, an' sez as how I was to give you his respects!" Brass replied, handing a large sealed envelope to the mine-owner, and then retiring.

"Who can this be from?" Malvern muttered, turning to a window. "None of my business acquaintances write in so graceful a hand!"

He tore it open, half suspiciously.

As he pulled out a sheet of paper a photograph in cabinet size fell to the floor. With an ejaculation of surprise, he stooped and picked it up. A glance at the picture—then he staggered back with a frightful oath which ended in a horrified shriek of terror, and the photograph fluttered to the floor. He gasped, and staggered to a seat, his eyes fixed glaringly upon the object on the carpet. "Ah! what blow is this? My brain is afire! my senses must be wandering. No! ten thousand curses—I saw it—that scene which has haunted the dreams of my life—saw it photographed upon that card! Ah! a-a-ah! curse me! Why am I so cowardly? 'Tis only a picture—ah! a-a-ah!"

The man was in a frightful state. He appeared like a madman, so fiendish was the expression of his features and eyes, as, crouching upon his hands and knees, he crept slowly toward the picture, as if he were afraid to touch it, lest it should dissolve into something that would annihilate him.

Every nerve in his frame seemed strung at the tightest tension—he was in a spell of terror bordering on actual frenzy.

Now! he reaches the picture, and with a low gasping growl, not unlike some mad beast, he gazes down at the scene which is photographed upon the card.

'Tis not a scene calculated to inspire any man with pleasant emotions, much less to the crime-haunted mine-owner, around whom the meshes of the retributive net are gradually gathering; nor is it a scene that often occurs on ordinary photographs.

It is of a room, in the center of which a coffin is placed upon the support of a pair of trestles. The lid is removed, and, wrapped in a shroud, there lies within the coffin the form and deathly face of a woman.

Beside the coffin is another figure—that of a boy, not yet in his teens.

He kneels, with hands clasped and eyes upraised toward heaven, as if taking an oath.

The features of both the boy and the corpse are distinct and recognizable to one who had seen the originals in life.

Munro Malvern had seen them, and recognized the dead face now, with a horrified oath.

"I am not mistaken!" he gasped, clutching the card between his hands. "I am not mistaken, curses upon her! It is she! and the brat! Ah! the devil—what thought is this which strikes me? Can it be—can it be *he*, this sleuth who has dogged me so faithfully? By heaven! it is too horrible for credence! But, even though such is the case, they shall not foil me—oh! no! they shall not foil me. The Big Bullion mine is yet in my power, and—ah! there somewhere is that which Robert Mapleton left, that should it come to light would de throne me. But it is buried where no one could find it, or else it would have been used against me long ere this. Yes, Munro Malvern, you have every chance of winning this little game yet, with your backing of gold!"

Persimmon Bill, the scout, whom we have casually mentioned in previous chapters, was a man with whom few in the city of Deadwood cared to meddle. He was stern and reticent, and was unpopular among the majority.

He put in a share of his time in the mines, where he owned a small pan-claim; or, when an opportunity offered, went as a guide with some exploring expedition or emigrant caravan.

Among those whom he counted his friends was the eccentric dare-devil, Baltimore Bess. They had met many times, and become as brother and sister to each other. Yet the scout had watched the girl with more than ordinary interest, for she was after his own liking in her dashing, vivacious, dauntless character.

Indeed, Bess had no lack of admirers among the "old residents" of the thriving city. All had learned that it was best to respect her, rather than to tender disrespect; for she had set an example sufficient of its kind by knocking down a couple of ruffians who had insulted her on her first appearance among them, in the free and easy character which she sustained.

No one dared to even think of or talk of her as they had of her predecessor, Calamity Jane. She was of the same general type of character, but was invested with a something which made an impure idea of her seem ridiculous.

As we have said, Persimmon Bill had watched her observantly, only to learn that she was "all on the square." He was not doing this for motives of matrimonial inclination as may be supposed, but for reasons which he made known to her this same day, which was to be the trial day both of Jessie Mapleton for theft, and Rosebud Rob for murder.

He had seen the dare-devil enter the "Little Brown Jug," and he followed her there, to find her engaged in conversation with Kentucky Jake, the red-nosed proprietor.

But she turned with a pleasant smile as she saw the scout.

"Is et you, Persimmon? What's gone wrong with your traps, old fellow?"

"Nothing, Baltimore, only I came to have a little talk with you—something a little private, you see," the scout replied, taking a retired seat by a deal-table.

"A private talk with me?" the girl cried, bursting

into a merry laugh. "Ha! ha! ha! a private bit of conversation with me. Eh, Kentucky, ye old hoss? how do thet sound ter you? Leetle thet way, ain't et?" and she laid a hand in the region of her heart.

"Haw! haw! I saw et ef don't strike an observer sum so," Kentucky Jake affirmed.

"Wall, jest you keep a revolver handy, then, Jake, and ef ye see me go ter gettin' soft an' squeamish, like, haul off and plug me one fer all ye're worth."

Then, laughing heartily at the idea, she crossed the floor, and joined the scout at the table.

"You needn't have feared, Bess," he said, pleasantly, "for it isn't my business to make love to any one. I think I can get along through life without a woman tied to my coat-tails."

"Hurra!" Bess cried, bringing her hand down in an enthusiastic slap upon the table, "bully fer you, Persimmons! I admire your resolve. A woman is poor stock at best, bet yer boots! Kentucky, ye brute, fetch me a cigar on that. Now, go on, pard."

"But you are a woman, Bess!" Bill said, in some surprise, as he gazed on her with admiration beaming from his eyes.

"Um! um!" was the reply, with a shake of the head. "Sence I tuk ter wearing breeches, Bill, I count myself just as big a man as there is in the mines, though I'll allow thar's sum'a dasted sight madder."

"True enough. And it is on a subject akin to one of these which I wish to speak about. You probably know that this is the day of the trial of Rosebud Rob, for murder. In my opinion it's going to give the poor fellow a close rub for the limb of a tree. The man Malvern has no end of money, as the Big Bullion mine, alone, is yielding him something above a thousand a week."

"Yas, et's goin' hard for the Sport," Baltimore Bess said, gazing moodily at the floor. "An' he war a cool sort of 'coon, w' plenty o' fun in him, when et cum ter fun."

"You are right, when you say that there is fun in him. If he had not got into this murder trap, there'd have been a new proprietor for the Big Bullion mine, I'm thinkin'. I say this as an admirer of the Sport—for he regards me as a being less than a man, all because of a little matter between us up in Cinnamon gulch. As usual, of course, there was a woman in it, you see?"

"I know'd it!" Bess said, with a sage nod of her head. "Never yet heerd of a quarrel twixt two men, yet, whar thar warn't a woman in it. Thet's ther confounded difficulty o' hev'in' 'em luxuriatin' in this glorious country, Bill—they're allus gettin' us sterner sex inter trouble. Why warn't all the women born men like you and I, Bill?"

"I cannot attempt to explain the conundrum, Baltimore!" the scout replied. "But, to the story. Another person ran away and left me in such a position as was a reflection of dishonor, and after that Rosebud Rob very justly cut my acquaintance. On coming here to Deadwood I was accidentally placed in charge of some papers which I have found relate to Rosebud Rob, and will no doubt be the means of clearing him from Judge Lynch's noose. I have been studying for some time if I could trust you with the possession of these papers, as I do not wish to hold them, and am not over eager to present them to the Sport in person. I have found that you were trusty, and I now wish to place them in your hands, that you may give them over into the hands of Rosebud Rob's counsel."

"What! give anything of the value of a pin into the hands of the colonel!" Bess exclaimed. "Not much fer Maloney! I'll just plead a part o' thet same case myself, providin' you give me the papers."

"Very well—do as you will. Here are the papers; and if my eyes are not at fault you'll make them count advantageously for Rosebud Rob. Now, good-by, for I am off as guide of a train to Big Butte creek. Give my respects to Rosebud Rob, and my hopes that he may escape from the toils of his foe!"

Then, shaking hands with Bess, the scout shouldered his rifle and left the tavern, first having left a package of papers upon the table.

After he had gone Bess picked them up and turned triumphantly to Kentucky Jake.

"Thar! ken ye dare ter say thet I haven't got the trump card now, ye galoot? Hurra! jest ter think thet I've proven myself a man among men by undertakin' ther responsibilities uv a lawsuit! Ther female sex ar' discounted—ar' nowhar! They'd faint at ther gigantic duties which devolve upon us men—wouldn't they, Jacob?"

"Yas! I opine they would purty much do thet same!" allowed Kentucky Jake, graciously. "I've allus kerried ther idee thet them feminines warn't o' much account more'n ter wash dishes an' darn socks!"

"On course they ain't! Wharfere I put on britches an' assumed ther dignity o' a man!" Bess said, triumphantly, as she left the saloon.

Just outside, she met Munro Malvern, who sprang upon her with an oath too vile to repeat.

"Give me those papers which the scout just gave you!" he cried. "Give them to me, curse you, or I'll murder you on the spot!"

"Will you?" the dare-devil cried; and then she exhibited her wonderful self-possession and power, by suddenly lifting the millionaire off his feet, and casting him heavily upon the earth. The next instant her right foot was planted upon his breast, as he would have risen, and a pair of revolvers looked threateningly down into his face.

"Oh! ho! Mr. Munro Malvern, ye will purty much murder me, won't ye? oh! yes, you bet yer pile! You've got gore right plum in yer eye, ain't ye?" she said, mockingly. "See heer, ye blotted old blasphemous buffler bull—d'ye know w'at I've a notion to do? D'ye know, I say? Wal, I've got a no-

tion ter put a lead perquisite right inter your nod-dleum, and don't ye disrecollect ef. My name is Baltimore Bess, E-s-q., ef ye never hed one o' my keards, an' I reckon as how ye'll find me bizness clear ter ther roots o' my toes!"

"Let me up!" Malvern gasped, white with rage and mortification, for a crowd was gathering, and he lying at the mercy of a mere girl. It was exasperating to him, in the greatest degree. "Let me up, curse you."

"Ef? what d'ye say? Me let ye up!" the girl mocked. "Ha! ha! thar is sumthin' like the sound o' circus in thet, to be sure. Et sounds like ther plays w'at they play on the stage. I'm ther galoot as has got you floored, an' now ye must beg my parding, or I won't let ye up. Eh—ain't thet ef, boys?"

"Hurra! thet's ef, Bess, gal!" yelled the colonel, in delight, as he pushed forward, while the rest of the men gave a shout of enthusiasm. "Thet's ther ticket, Bess! Give ef ter him, ole gal! Ye're a true he'rine, ef ther gold medal fer sublime beauty do descend ter me, as ther purtiest flower o' mankind, thet ever bloomed an' blossomed in ther classikal shades o' Deadwood gulch!"

"Let me up!" Munro Malvern gasped, again making a fierce attempt to rise.

But Baltimore's foot quickly pushed him back, and the cocked six-shooters were thrust nearer to his nose.

"Beg my parding first, an' ye shall get on yer pegs as quick as ye please!" she said, grimly.

"I will do nothing o' the kind!" was the fierce response.

"Oh! hol ye won't, eh? You want ter spoil ther romance, do ye? Well, as a novel writer sez, add in a leetle more blood and thunder—so now, either beg my parding, or in less five minutes, by ther wiggling o' Bill Stokes's ears, you're a dead man. Ain't thet right, boys? Shan't I salivate him, ef he refuses to do honor ter my request?"

"Hooray!" cried the men.

"An' ye'll pucture me from hangin', ef I do bullet-doze him!"

"Hooray! We will do jest thet leetle bizness!" cried Colonel Bill, who, with the rest, had caught the cue. "So, heave ahead, Bess, an' give ther undertaker a job. I'll stand by ye like a true beautiful disciple o' Blackstun, which I am. Plug et right to him, an' ye'll hev a hull army o' backin', and hold a Wake-Nickodemon over his carcass, you bet!"

"You heer ther universal verdict!" Bess said, gazing triumphantly down at the discomfited millionaire. "Ye heer what ther honest citizens say about it. Ter make ther romance complete, ye've got ter pony up an' beg my parding, or I'll diabolize your speerit with presentiments of cold plumbago!"

"Curse you! I'll have your life for this gross insult!" the down-trodden villain cried. "Let me up, I say, or I'll—"

"Thare! thare! Don't go fer ter git gore in yer eye again!" Baltimore Bess cried, shaking the revolvers threateningly. "Come! come! yer time fer angelical prenegations aire purty nigh up, by ther wigglin' o' Bill's ears. D'ye beg?"

"Yes, curse you, if it will do you any good!"

"Ha! ha! it do thet same, purty much!" the dare-devil laughed. "Do ye beg wi' all yer might an' main?"

"Yes! Let me up!"

"D'ye promise never ter lay violent hands on a diminutive earthquake ag'in—ter never show yer authority about this town?"

"I promise anything you may ask!" was the faint reply. "For God's sake let me up!"

With a cool laugh the girl removed her foot from his breast, and stepped back with the revolvers still in her grasp.

Munro Malvern staggered to his feet, with a vile oath, amid the grins and chuckles of the spectators.

Just at this instant his dutiful step-son, Ralph Lamont, came zigzagging along, with the appearance of a man who had been on a week's "bum." His clothes were soiled and disarranged, his hat battered in, and his handkerchief valled one eye, which had been effectually closed for repairs, in some drunken spree. Altogether, Mr. Lamont had a grotesque appearance, as he staggered forward. But his eye lighted up with a glitter of recognition, as he beheld the dust-bedrabbled millionaire.

"P-poor, dear Unky!" he said, making a vain attempt to brush off the dust. "How I suffered that thou shouldst be cast beneath the feet of thy foeman; b-but you s-see, old man, I couldn't git here before!"

"Ho! ho! pilgrims; luk w'at a purty pair!" Baltimore Bess cried, pointing at the twin with a merry peal of laughter. "Ain't they sweet as canned peaches, now? They remind me o' a pair o' Greek statters. Hooray! I vote thet we bounce 'em!"

"Jest my notion, perzactly, Bess!" assented Colonel Bill, in huge delight. "Bounce 'em—thet's ther true word fer et, old gal. Ah! I don't know w'at these yere hills'd do w'out yer wit an' my beauty, Bess."

"Sure enough, Bill, you dandelion! But, come; let's clear the street of this trash. Feller-citizens, sum o' ye grab a couple o' sharp-edged poles!"

The proposition was greeted with hilarious shouts, but the step-father and son did not stop to see how the affair might terminate.

They suddenly seemed imbued with an unknown terror, and the way they ran up the gulch was a novel and refreshing sight. Nor did they pause until they gained the steps of the Malvern mansion, when the millionaire turned and shook his fist savagely back at the crowd.

"He's madder than a rheumatic old wasup!" shouted Baltimore Bess, returning the fist shake, "but, et's no use o' his tryin' ter git ahead o' us fellers, is thar, Bill, my beauty?"

CHAPTER XI.

IN COURT AND SCENES THEREOF.

THE coming trial of Rosebud Rob had elicited much interest among the Deadwoodites. Principally, because a trial for murder was an uncommon event, as ten times out of one the murderer escaped, and if caught at all was informally lynched by the Vigilantes.

But, there was a case for which the accused was to stand up and receive trial, and be dealt with accordingly, as the law might see fit.

In his short residence in the magic city, Rosebud Rob had attained no little notoriety as a cool, dauntless sport, and he had won hosts of friends among those who discounted evil, and worked for good results. And very few among those who had heard the report, believed that Rosebud was guilty of murder.

The gossip was in the mouths of nearly every man to be met, and during the forenoon of the day set for the trial the main street in the gulch was one mass of humanity, and the words "Rosebud Rob" "the Sport," "murder," and so forth, were to be heard on every hand.

By noon all the space in the court-room, that was available, was filled, and an eager, restive multitude surged outside.

Such space as was necessary for those concerned in the trials, had been fenced off, to keep back the crowd.

Judge Jacob sat in state in the judge's stand, prepared for the duties of the day. Adolphus Cole, clerk of court, had a seat and desk directly beneath the shadow of the judicial throne, and upon either side of him were tables for the legal fraternity, who were to "argy the case."

Of these latter Colonel Bill Stokes was to be the defendants' counsel, both for Rosebud Rob and Jessie Mapleton. The case of the former was not to be called until the larceny case had been tried.

Munro Malvern, realizing that he must make a strong last effort in order to save himself, had engaged a lawyer who had won several suits of late, and was considered good authority on legal matters.

At the hour for the trial of Jessie Mapleton, Sheriff Shelby led her into the court-room, and gave her a chair, after which he took one, close at hand. There were also present Hickory Hank and his three pals, the dare-devil, Baltimore Bess, and the cinnamon-haired proprietor of the "Little Brown Jug," Kentucky Jake, and a man in black with a mask upon his face.

Shortly after, Munro Malvern entered, accompanied by his attorney, a man of villainous countenance, named Small; his dutiful step-son, Lamont, and the colored servitor, Brass.

After they were seated, the judge took a nip from a bottle which ornamented his pulpit, and which bore a glaring label "Deadly Poison!"

Then, with a commanding ahem! he arose, and glared down upon those below him, grandly.

"Silence!" shouted Adolphus Syringus Cole, rising and rapping upon the table. "I call order. The case will now be opened by the Right Honorable Judge Schriener, from the nine hundred and sixth Congressional district. Order, all! I have the honor of introducing his Excellency!"

"Dot's me!" the worthy judge announced, "dot's me, der shudge mit dis agust shury. Veller-citizens, I was most happy ter call up von case vich demands a heap of consideration—dat is ter say, der case off Miss Shessie Mapleton, accused of larceny mit our distinkished townsmen, Mr. Munro Malvern. Mr. Sheriff you vill conduct der trial, ef you please, an' der first man dat lies, you shoot him deadt—I'll pack you!"

Shelby arose with a bow, and turned to Munro Malvern.

"Have you all your witnesses, sir?"

"I have. They consist of Grim, Hayseed Jim, Holy Moses, and Popular Pete, besides myself and step-son, Mr. Lamont," the millionaire replied, triumphantly.

"And this colored chap?"

"Oh! he comes on in this next case."

"Ah!" and Shelby turned to Colonel Bill. "Mr. Stokes, what have you on the defense?"

Stokes arose, with a bow.

"Ef ye please, Mr. Sheriff, thet shinin' beatitude o' ther female firmament, Baltimore Bess."

"I object!" cried Munro Malvern.

"Silence!" roared the judge. "Clerk, fine dot man five dollars for contempt mit der court!"

"Bess ar' one!" continued the colonel. "Then, thar is thet honest, law-abidin' citizen, Kentucky Jake, he's another. Then, there's the masked chap who calls hisself Nugget Ned—"

"Stop! that man is a road-agent, and shall not testify!" cried Munro Malvern, furiously.

"Silence!" roared the judge. "Clerk, fine dot man five dollars. Mr. Malvern, I pet you swi' drinks vot you lie. Dot man vill testify, ef der old court knows herself."

"Don't that make three?" the colonel cried; "then hayr's erurther witness in my own beautiful individuality."

"Five witnesses for the prosecution and five for the defense, myself included!" Shelby announced. "Mr. Small, I believe you open the prosecution."

"I do in a brief and concise manner for my client, Mr. Malvern!" Small announced, loftily. "Indeed, I feel assured that there is need of but little argument to convince the most honorable judge that the accused is deserving of punishment."

"Dot's me!" nodded the judge, rising to take a nip out of the bottle, and then sinking back again.

"It appears," added the lawyer for the prosecution, "that the Right Honorable Mr. Malvern was enticed into the house of the defendant on the after-

noon of the —th instant, for purposes of consummating a rascally scheme."

"Stop! dot's a tyufel aff a lie!" vociferated the judge, hotly. "Clerk, fine der prosecution for deviatin' from der truth—fine 'em ten dollars!"

"We men!" continued the eloquent Small, "are all fond of female society, and we cannot attach blame to the prosecutor for being led astray. As it appears, he was treated to liquor, and it being drugged, he was stupefied."

"While in this state his pockets were rifled of a package of money, amounting to a thousand dollars; and that package was found since, in under the carpet in the defendant's room, by the sheriff, here, and Messrs. Grim, Moses and two others. I believe that is a plain statement of the case, Mr. Judge, and I appeal to you to consider it, and deal with the culprit as she justly deserves. If you like, Mr. Malvern will take oath."

"Silence! I would not dake dot shyter's oath mit a pack of Biple so higher as my head!" cried Schriener. "Bill Stokes, you swear dem vittnesses for der prosecution. Clerk of der Court, put down every syllable vot dey say."

Hickory Hank took the stand, and, after being sworn, testified in effect that he and his pards were crossing the gulch on the afternoon of the theft, and seeing the defendant beckon the prosecutor to enter her shanty, they smelt a rat, and crept to a window to watch, and saw the defendant sit upon the lap of the party of the prosecution and tempt him with liquor, until he was in a maudlin state, after which she took a package of bills from his pocket; then supporting him to the door, pushed him headforemost into the street.

Witness and pards had picked party of prosecution up, and supported him home, where, upon becoming once more himself, he had missed the money.

H yseed Jim, Holy Moses, and Poplar Pete were next sworn, and testified to the same as Hickory Hank.

"Is the counsel for the defense satisfied?" Small demanded, triumphantly.

"Nary a time!" replied Colonel Bill, mounting his table as he began to warm up to his work. "Nary a time, ye leetle spindle-shanked flunkie! Whereas, in ther coorse o' hooman events, et becomes me, ther beauty o' ther Western hemisphere, to be counsel in so grand an' glorious a cause as thet pure an' innocent leetle lady there—resolved thet I may be teetotally steeped in ther fires o' ther crater o' Vessuvius ef I don't lay fer ther job, hull hog or none. Feller-citizens, et's a grand—a geolorious thing ter hev et in yer power ter labor fer them tender leetle bits o' hoomanity o' ther feminine sex—darn my eyes ef et ain't thet same! I glory in et, bet yer boots."

"It is my passion ter labor for their innocent an' inoffensive cause. I love 'em; they're a being that ar' supremely magnificent. Now, in this case, Mr. Hickory Hank Grim, w'at hour was et thet Mr. Malvern entered the house of Miss Mapleton?"

"Half after two, perzactly, as I remember lukin' at my watch!" Grim replied, rather nervously.

"Aire thet karect, Mr. Malvern?"

"Certainly!" was the reply.

"Grim, w'at time war et when Mr. Malvern issued forth from Miss Mapleton's place of residence, in the manner you describe?"

"Exactly a quarter o' three!"

"Then, he was inside the presence o' ther defendant just fifteen minutes, eh? Well, I suppose you went d'rect hum wi' ther party o' ther prosecution?"

"V-yes!"

"What time did you arrive there?"

"At ten minutes to three."

"Mr. Malvern, ar' thes karect?"

"Quite so!"

"Mr. Lamont wull please be sworn!"

Lamont testified that he was at the door when Grim brought the prosecutor home, in an insensible and drunken state, and that on waking he had missed the money.

"Is thet all ther testimony you hev ter offer fer ther prosecution, Mr. Small, or w'atever yer name is?" Colonel Bill demanded.

"I believe it is," was the reply; "and it is strong enough that no sane jury ought to pause for deliberation in rendering a verdict."

"Don't you vas be too sure apoud dot," cried the judge. "It so happens dot I pe shudge mit dis shury, unt I am capable of rendering von verdict. Defendant, we will now hear from you."

"In behalf of Miss Mapleton," said Sheriff Shelby, rising. "I will say that we have proof that the testimony given before this court by the witnesses of the prosecution amounts to a pack of base, damnable lies. Mr. Small, you are at liberty to swear the vittnesses for the defense."

Baltimore Bess was then sworn.

"Shelby ar' purty much right," she said. "Et's a hull devilish plot o' Munro Malvern ter ruin this young woman, because she refused to marry him. It was I who chanced ter overheer ther interview 'twixt Miss Mapleton and Malvern. I see'd him go inter ther shanty, and, out o' curiosity, I played spy, and, as it appears, quite fortunately, Malvern had called to offer her money, which he claimed was due her from an interest w'ich her father hed hed in some claim or other, up in Thunder gulch. Miss Malvern had jest received a letter purporting to come from her father, in which certain charges ag'in this Malvern were cleared up. In gratitude she finally consented to receive the money, but she hed scarcely done so when Malvern offers ter make her his wife."

"It is an accursed lie!" Munro Malvern cried, springing savagely toward the dare-devil, only to be hurried back by Shelby. "It is—"

"Silence!" roared the judge, from his box. "Clerk, fine dot veller ten dollars unt costs."

"Miss Mapleton scornfully refused ther cuss," continued Baltimore Bess, "w'en his motives becum plain, an' she ordered him frum ther house. He went, swearin' ter hev revenge. I see'd him leave the house, an' he warn't pitched out nuther, nor was he drunk. They had drunk no lickter together, fer Miss Mapleton ain't thet kind o' a hair-pin, ye bet yer boots! Hank Grim ner his pals warn't nowhar around w'en Munro Malvern entered and left Miss Mapleton's shanty."

Malvern paced up and down the floor, cursing like a madman, for he saw that the dare-devil's testimony was dead against him.

"Is that all you have to say?" Small demanded, sternly.

"Not quite. I saw Munro Malvern walk toward his house, and enter."

"How about the time, as given by Grim, young woman?"

"Wal, as ter thet, the time o' Malvern's entering and leaving Miss Mapleton's place, et war p rty much correct. But Grim war nowhar in the neighborhood at ther time."

Kentucky Jake was next sworn, and gave his testimony.

"Hickory Hank war in my saloon, ther 'Little Brown Jug,' for fifteen minutes, commencing at half-past two. They drank, an' then Grim whispered to his pals, and left. I follered him ter the door, an' see'd him go up ther street an' enter Malvern's house. Chancin' ter look down ther street, I see'd Malvern cum out o' Miss Mapleton's, an' go ter his own place. He warn't no more drunk then I am. That's ther end o' my testimony!"

"Nugget Ned!" said Sheriff Shelby; "have you any information to offer in this matter?"

"Not a great deal in this case, but more in the case to come!" the young Knight of the Gulch replied. "You all have known me, and counted me a road-agent. But you have been mistaken. My business in the Black Hills is mainly to hunt down a murderer to death—not to kill him with weapons, but to bound him to the gallows. I am a man of the night and day. I go and come whenever and wherever I please."

"I chanced to be in the mansion of Munro Malvern after his return from Miss Mapleton's. This ruffian, Hickory Hank, was also there. I played the part of spy, and overheard a plot between Munro Malvern and Grim, to the effect that the latter was to do as has been done—that is, arrest Miss Mapleton on the charge of the theft of the money, which he, Malvern, had given her. I even overheard Malvern plot to himself, how he would visit the young lady in her cell, and offer to procure her release if she would marry him!"

As the knight finished, loud yells of indignation arose on the air from the spectators; revolvers flashed at every hand; all was excitement of the most intense nature.

"Silence!" roared the judge, mounting the extreme top of his judicial pulpit, and waving his hands to enjoin the silence he would establish. "Silence, I dole you. Yust make so much noise ag'in mit dis court-room, as der drop off a pin, unt I plov you all ter dunder mit my revolver. Dot's der kind off a hand-organ I am!"

"Hooraay! them's my philosoffike thoughts, too," put in Colonel Bill, with a victorious pigeon-cut, on top of his table. "Yer most august and excellent honorable judge, ye've heard ther testimony given on fust one side, then on t'other, an' we do most cheerfully submit it ter ye fer consid'ashun!"

"Shimminy Shackson! I discharge der case," cried the judge. "Mr. Sheriff, der prisoner is free to go. She didn't stole anydings, as has been clearly proven. Arrest dot man, Munro Malvern; I fine him a hundred dollars for dryin' der sheat de lady out of her garner."

"Miss Mapleton will remain until after the trial of her brother," Shelby said. "Mr. Malvern will you pay the fines imposed upon you or stand arrest?"

"I'll pay them," the foiled villain said, taking out his purse.

"Please to tell me the whole amount."

"Sewi hundred dollars covers all te fines, and der costs mit der suit," announced the judge, taking a swig from his "plizen" bottle.

Munro Malvern was deathly white with rage, as he counted out the bills and gave them to Shelby.

"Now, Miss Mapleton," he said, as he turned toward Jessie, "since you have beat me at my own game, be kind enough to name what sum of money will repay you for the dishonor reflected upon you by this public trial."

Jessie arose to her feet, trembling in every limb, and threw back the veil which had hitherto covered her face.

"Sir!" she said, her tones quivering and eyes flashing, "I would scorn to touch a straw which had been in your villainous hands. Your baseness and evil designs have freely been illustrated to all present."

She took her seat again midst stormy applause. For the spectators were warm in their sympathy for her; while, for Munro Malvern, a strong tide of anger was arising among the crowd within and without the building—and there were councils among knots of miners, and expressions and threats passed which boded no good for the wealthy arch-schemer.

"You have triumphed!" Munro Malvern said, bitterly, "and I acknowledge myself foiled. But, mind you, your triumph is but transient. On the impending murder case, I shall be able to strike you a blow, where in there need be no false testimony. Ha! ha!"

And with a villainous laugh he turned and left the court-room.

"Fifteen minutes for refreshments, before der od-

de case comes on!" announced the judge, and, as a consequence, there was a promiscuous scattering and the room was cleared of all save Sheriff Shelby, Jessie, Baltia ore Bess and the Gulch Knight, Nugget Ned.

Now that the matter was decided in her favor, very woman-like Jessie had to have a little cry, and Shelby stood close at hand, in the form of consoler.

"Oh! sir!" she said, "I fear that bad bold man more than I can tell you. He hates me, and if, as you believe, I and my dear brother stand in his way of the ownership of his property, he will stop at nothing to have us put out of the way! Oh! I fear for my poor dear brother whom I have but a faint recollection of!"

"Fear not for his welfare, fair lady!" said Nugget Ned, advancing, with a bow. "Though I am masked and unknown to you, let me assure you that I shall be able to contribute toward making him free, and innocent to the world of this crime of which he is charged!"

"Oh! thank you, sir!" Jessie cried, joyfully. "I cannot find words to express my gratitude toward you for the service you have already rendered me."

"An' ef he ken't furnish enough, ma'am!" said Baltimore Bess, "hayr's w'at kin add o' j'ack-mules an' a twenty foot whip, thet ther Sport don't swing—ye heer me, Baltimore Bess, a man o' ther people!"

"I thank you, too, Bessie, I thank all of you for befriending us in this hour of need. God only knows what would have become of me had it not been for your kindness."

"Charity and good deeds to the weak and innocent, will be approved by the Lord!" said Shelby. "Excuse me, Miss Mapleton—I will go fetch your brother, before the court-room becomes crowded again."

And he took his departure.

CHAPTER XII.

A CELEBRATED CASE.

AFTER leaving the court-room, Munro Malvern went down the gulch street to the Jardin Mabille, where he was speedily joined by the lawyer, John Small, who had followed him, at a signal from the mine-owner.

"Well!" the latter growled, after he had finished a brimming glass of brandy—"what have you to say for yourself in regard to the trial?"

"Don't think there's much to say!" Small replied.

"I am sure I made no blunder. It was you who put the case together wrongly, and got caught in a trap."

"Yes! curses on me!" the plotter growled. "I did not suppose the defense would be so well prepared. But, it's no use of growling over spilt milk. The Sport must hang—d'y'e hear? He must hang, and I'll get rid of the girl in some different manner!"

"Exactly!" Small said; "the fellow shall be convicted, if within my power, I assure you. But, sir, wouldn't it be best to settle for the old case, before you are on with the new?"

"How do you mean, pray?"

"Only two hundred dollars, if you please—only two hundred, as a compensation for defending your celebrated case."

"Curse it, but you did not win the case, you rascal! I was not to pay you unless you succeeded in securing a conviction of the girl."

"Oh! very well; if you do not pay as you go, I cut you very grandly!" the attorney said, with a disdainful bow. "Good-day, Mr. Malvern; I hope you will find no difficulty in finding a competent counsel in your next case!"

"Stop!" the arch villain cried, as he saw his tool move toward the door.

"Here is your two hundred dollars. Now, I shall expect you to procure a conviction of this Rosebud Rob. Do you hear?"

Small seized the roll of bills with a satisfied grin and thrust them in his pocket.

"I hear, most august client!" he replied, "but, really, I could not think of undertaking a murder case, without cash in advance. Let me see—say, five hundred dollars, square!"

"The devil take your impudence, man!" the mine-owner growled. "I have not so much money in my possession."

"Bah! Why parley for so insignificant a sum? Give me your check for the amount!"

Without more adieu, Malvern pencilled off the desired check.

Now see that you convict the fellow," he growled, as he turned away.

"Rest assured, dear client, that he will hang within the day," Small replied, taking a swig at the bar, and then hurrying back to the court.

Munro Malvern was there soon after, reinforced with several glasses of brandy, which was just enough to make him ugly.

Sheriff Shelby had not yet arrived with the prisoner.

There were in the witness-box now, Munro Malvern; his colored servant, Brass; the dutiful step-son, Ralph Lamont; besides Nugget Ned, Baltimore Bess, and the scout, Persimmon Bill, who at the last moment had concluded to be present at the trial.

"What testimony have you to offer?" Munro Malvern asked, fiercely, as he turned upon his step-son. "I did not invite your testimony in this case that I know of."

"Correct, dear Unky!" the spendthrift replied; "but, taking an interest as usual in your behalf, I

hied myself hither, that thou shouldst not be defenseless."

"Ha! then your testimony—"

"Is all right; never you fear," was the calm reply. "I have been awakened to my duty within the past few hours. The Lord hath paid me a visit in a dark hour, and pointed out to me a path to tread through life. Henceforth, I shall bid adieu to old associations, and follow the path of virtue and religion."

"The devil take your nonsense!" Munro Malvern said. "Ha! ha! you were ever a good actor, Ralph. Listen: if you give testimony against the Sport, you shall be a thousand dollars richer when he is hanged."

"Attempt not to lure me from the path of godliness, thou man, lest thou shalt be snate by mine hand!" the step-son said, turning away, and looking out-of-sorts with the bandage over his eyes.

Munro Malvern glared after him, with a puzzled stare.

"What's got into the cursed fool!" he muttered. "Is he fooling, or is he in earnest?"

If the court-room had been full during the trial of Jessie Mapleton it was packed nearly to suffocation now, and it was with difficulty that Sheriff Shelby entered with the prisoner. A murmur of applause emanated from either hand, as the Sport stood proudly in the space allotted to him, a cool, defiant smile upon his face.

It was evident he had more friends than enemies in the vast throng.

There was one noticeable fact, also, that a number of the men within the room were attired and masked the same as Nugget Ned.

Munro Malvern had been one of the first to notice this fact, and he trembled as he caught the stern, piercing gaze of the Knight of the Gulch.

It was the same out in the thronged street as in the court-room. These masked men had suddenly made their appearance in undesirable numbers—from whence no one knew. All were armed, and they were too numerous for a thought to be entertained of their arrest as road-agents.

Inside the court-room the trial was about to begin.

Judge Schriner occupied his judicial pulpit with grand dignity. Likewise did Adolphus Syringus Cole and Col. Bill Stokes sit like statues of justice at their respective tables.

The witnesses were disposed of in positions facing his Honor.

"Shentlemon mit der shury!" said the judge, arising, "dis case must be tried shorter ash quick, vor der day ish openin' his arms to embrace der night. Ve vill hear vot der prisoner has ter say."

"Mr. Sheriff, you will swear all off dose witnesses before any destiny ish given."

Accordingly the strongest oath in the Black Hills jurisprudence was administered to the Sport, Rosebud Rob, and to Munro Malvern, Lamont, Brass, Baltimore Bess, Nugget Ned, and Persimmon Bill.

Rosebud Rob then took the stand, without the least visible embarrassment, and glanced at every person present before he spoke.

"I don't know as what I have to say will produce any marked effect!" he remarked, a little smile hovering about his face. "A man accused of murder is not to be generally believed in giving testimony. What I have to say can be said in a very few moments. I was coming down from my boarding-place, the night of the murder. It was late, but I was in a restless state, and I concluded to go down to the Mabille, to see what was going on. When I had arrived in the neighborhood of Munro Malvern's house, before which it seems the murder occurred, I heard a pistol-shot, but attached no great importance to it, as they are frequent sounds here in the mines. I walked on, and just in front of Malvern's house I stumbled over a body lying in the middle of the road. In horror I stopped by it, never once thinking that I was in a suspicious position. I even picked up the revolver, with which the crime had been committed, from the road where it had been left. I wiped off the dust and endeavored to find if it was marked, but could make out nothing in the moonlight. At this moment Sheriff Shelby, here, and several others came up, and just then Munro Malvern stepped from his mansion and accused me of the crime, saying he had seen me commit it. That is the extent of my testimony, except that I may add that, being the son of the late Robert Mapleton, I was searching into my father's affairs, with the suspicion that he was the real owner of the Big Bullock mine. Malvern knew this, and probably foresaw a good chance to get rid of a dangerous claimant by charging me with the murder of the Pistol Queen."

A deafening shout of applause rent the air, as the Sport concluded his simple testimony.

It was evident where the general sympathy was.

Munro Malvern next took the stand.

"The clever lying of the defendant I see has made a marked effect!" he said, with a contemptuous smile. "But crafty villains with murder in their hearts usually are graced with a very flippant tongue, and the prisoner is no exception to the rule. Unknown and unvouched for, he comes into our town, in the character of a bravado, with a foppish make-up, and first we know he is the hero of a murder case. It is generally the result that this gay, sportive individual finally eludes justice, only to hide himself to another town, to repeat the programme of his late career. But, in the present instance, he was caught in the act."

"On the night of the murder I was not sleepy, and sat at my window till past my usual bed-time, looking down upon the street. At last, growing tired, I partly undressed; then, hearing a noise upon the street, I glanced once more from my window. I saw a female figure running up the gulch, from in the

direction of the 'Euchre Deck' place, closely pursued by a man. Just in front of my place he overtook and grasped her by the shoulder.

"She attempted to scream, but he clutched her by the throat, and drawing a revolver, shot her through the heart. In horror I rushed down to the street, to find that Sheriff Shelby had already arrived on the spot. The murderer I had recognized from the window as the sport who styles himself Rosebud Rob."

"I pet five dollars vot dot was a pig lie," declared the judge, excitedly. "Mr. Sheriff, we will hear from you."

"My testimony amounts to but little," Shelby replied. "I heard the pistol-shot, and hastened to the spot, to find the prisoner standing by the body, with a revolver in his grasp. He denied that he had aught to do with the murder, and submitted to arrest."

"It is simply useless to proceed further with this case," cried Munro Malvern, with a smile of diabolical triumph, "as sufficient proof has been shown that Rosebud Rob was the murderer. I propose that we hurry him out, and hoist him to a tree. Hurrah! what do you say? Or, if you want more, here is my colored servant who witnessed the act, and also my step-son, Mr. Ralph Lamont."

"Shut up!" roared his honor. "Clerk, fine dot man finf unswany dollars an' costs. Ve vill hear every vittness, ef der old court knows goot lager, unt ve dink she do."

Brass, the servant, next took the stand.

He was very much scared, evidently, for the whites of his eyes rolled ludicrously, especially when he caught a threatening glance from the masked knight, Nugget Ned.

"Dis yer nigger see'd der murder, fo' suah, an' he's goin' ter make a clean breast of it. I went to bed about half an hour before de t'ing happened, but, hearin' de massa up, I slid out an' went down stairs. I see'd de massa standin' nigh up to de hall-door, but he didn't see dis chile, now. Furty soon, de key turns in de lock, an' de door dun slam open. Den, dis chile shore see de massa thrust a pistol for 'a'd, an' shute de gal. He catch her, an' drag her into de street, den run back in de house, an' pull off his coat an' boots like as if he done jes' got up out o' bed. Furty soon he go out in de street, an' accuse de chap wid de rosebud o' murder in de dust degree. Shuah, dot's ebery'ting dis nigger knows, 'cept dat massa wanted me to swar 'g'in de Sport."

The sensation was great!

Shouts of indignation rose on every hand, and died into a sullen, hissing groan.

Munro Malvern, who had been instantly seized and handcuffed by Sheriff Shelby, raved and swore like a madman.

"Ten thousand curses!" he roared, in furious rage. "Tis all a damnable plot to ruin me. That black devil has been bribed to swear against me!"

"Silence!" yelled his Honor, between sundry nips at the "pizen" bottle—"silence! Let der case go on. Ve vill haff a thorough hearing mit dis matter, so sure ash I pe von gran' shudge. Nugget Ned, take der stand!"

The Knight of the Gulch complied, his black eyes glittering, keenly.

"The darkey told the truth. Munro Malvern undoubtedly did murder the girl," he said. "I have here a paper which I obtained from my secret search of the dead girl's person, last night. It is to the effect that the young lady was to start on a search for the man who murdered her father and ruined herself. This person she believed to be Malvern, as he is here known, and she was going to pay him a visit to find out for certain. Here is the document, sheriff. Furthermore, in testimony, I would add, I was on the spot at the time Rosebud Rob was arrested by Sheriff Shelby. At the time of Shelby's arrival, the Sport dropped the revolver, which he claims to have found near the body, and drew a pair of his own. But, on being accused by Malvern, it seems he concluded to surrender, and dropped his weapons. So that, after the crowd had dispersed, I made it my business to pick up all three weapons. Here they are, now," and he laid three weapons upon the table. "The two last dropped by Rosebud Rob, bear his own name, Robert Mapleton. The other one bears the name of—Munro Malvern!"

Examination proved this to be correct.

White, and speechless at the crushing evidence being brought against him, Munro Malvern had sunk upon a chair, where he was closely guarded by Shelby.

"Is this all, witness?" the sheriff asked.

"Not quite!" Nugget Ned replied, tearing off his mask, and revealing a handsome young face, with regular features, and piercing black eyes.

"Let me discard my *nom de plume*, and introduce myself to you as Captain Ephraim Sanderson, a detective, and the son of the man whom you have known as Munro Malvern. His real name is Garyl Sanderson. The murder of the girl, here has not been the first one he has committed. Years ago he married a girl in Montgomery, Alabama, for her money. The bride and her brother were the only heirs to vast money-wealth, and the bride came into her portion of the fortune five years after her marriage with Garyl Sanderson. During that time yonder villain hovered at her side, anything but a dutiful husband; but, no sooner had she received her money, than he murdered her in cold blood, and fled with the whole amount in his possession. I chanced to be the only result of their unhappy union, and was, at the time, about four years of age.

"The murderer fled and escaped. My uncle, Leslie Carrollton, spent nearly the best part of his fortune in trying to find him. Immediately after the murder he caused me to take an oath over my mo-

ther's coffin, and he caused the scene to be painted, and a photograph was afterward taken of it.

"He stayed with me, or rather took me with him, for eight long years of search. But, at the age of twelve, he sent me out upon the world, well supplied with money, and bound by a terrible oath never to stop going until I had hunted my own father down to death.

"I have kept my oath; I have been a sleuth upon his track; I have known his whereabouts for a year past, but have been watching a chance to nab him. Here are two warrants for his arrest as a murderer, but, as he can hang but once, they are useless. Now, I have done my work!"

And, replacing his mask, the knight-detective left the room amid wild shouts. In ten minutes more, neither he nor the other masked men were in sight.

"I have a little matter to fix here," said Persimmon Bill, stepping forward. "You are all aware that a miner, Robert Mapleton by name, disappeared in a mysterious manner somewhat over a year ago. He was a quiet, unobtrusive man, and very few knew anything about his affairs. Everybody supposed that he had got tired of laboring at such claims as he had, and had gone off to search for richer fields. Probably, none out of a hundred would have believed that he had been murdered. Yet, such was the case. I accidentally came upon his body, after he had been shot in a half a dozen places through the body. He was not dead yet, and gasped out to me a confession which I took down.

He stated that he owned a tract of land which only that day, he and his pard, in some other dealings, had discovered to be vastly rich in mineral ore. Upon finding this, his companion, Munro Malvern, had decoyed into the lonely confine of the mountains, and shot him. Bess, please hand the package I gave you, to Mr. Shelby."

The sheriff examined the several documents, and then said:

"The witness is undoubtedly right. The confession is the late miner's own, I feel certain, because I have been able to gather its several facts from persons who knew him. The other papers are a will, leaving the property known as the Big Bullion mine, to Miss Jessie Mapleton, with the exception of a dollar, which is to go to a truant son, named Robert, should he turn up. There is, also, a deed of the Big Bullion property to the late owner."

"Der court is dismissed!" announced the judge. "Rosebud Rob pe free, an' Munro Malvern he go mit der shail, unt be hanged mit der neck, ter-morrow, ondl he ish deader as sixty-swi door nails. Such is shustice in dis city of Deadwood mit der Black Hills."

Accordingly, there was a general leaving of the seat of justice.

Sheriff Shelby had the honor of escorting Munro Malvern back to the cell but recently occupied by the Sport, Rosebud Rob, who now was free to escort his sister, with whom he had previously had an interview, to her humble but cosy home, where, of course there was a gladsome reunion.

And among those invited to a pretty little supper, were they who had testified in behalf of the two children of the late miner. There were the worthy judge of the court, and the festive Colonel Stokes, along with Baltimore Bess, Persimmon Bill, the negro, Brass, Kentucky Jake, and several others.

Sheriff Shelby dropped in, and was warmly received by both Rosebud Rob, and Jessie—especially, by the latter, who saw much to admire in the stalwart, handsome man, who had proven himself a generous friend.

And, there was a gladsome time within the little shanty home. The party were at the supper-table, when there came a knock upon the door; it opened, and Nugget Ned stood inside the apartment.

CHAPTER XIII.

VENGEANCE—CONCLUSION.

"Do not let me disturb you, pray!" the knight said, pleasantly. "I merely dropped in to see if you were enjoying yourselves, after the scenes of the trial."

"Let me assure you that we are!" Rosebud Rob said, rising and advancing with extended hands.

"Shake, Sir Knight, and at the same time accept my strongest thanks for your efforts in my behalf. You did act nobly for me, and I welcome you as a guest at my sister's board."

"I can tarry but a moment, thank you!" Nugget Ned replied. "One more job, and then the Black Hills country has seen the last of me and my so-styled knights. Before I go, I have a gift for some one among you, and I know of none more deserving than you, Mr. Mapleton. Since you have been ignored in your late father's will, here is a map of the Black Hills, with directions for finding one of the richest shaft mines which the world has ever known. I freely give it to you, and bequeath to you the control of the army of men whom you will find working the mine, any time you may visit it."

"They are all bound by oath to serve me, and never disband, until by universal consent. You must, therefore, mask yourself, that they may never know that you are not me. All depends upon your maintaining the secret. You can become a rich man, if you play the game honestly, under disguise. That is all, sir. I wish you all happiness and unalloyed bliss for the remainder of your lives, and that no scheming rascal may ever try to put you into a criminal court, as has my villainous father!"

Then, turning upon his heel, the knight suddenly left the shanty.

Rosebud Rob sprung after him, but too late. He had vanished from sight.

"A strange fellow," said Shelby, as Rob returned. "He has kept his boyish oath, by trailing his own father into the hands of the law. His uncle must have been a bitter man."

"He was a queer customer!" Rosebud Rob replied. "I chanced to meet him, up in Cinnamon gulch. He kind of adopted me, and trained me into the coolness and nerve which I possess. I grew to think a great deal of him, and when he died he left me his money, although it was no great sum."

"He also told me the story which Nugget Ned related in the court-room, and set me in pursuit of the guilty villain. As soon as I first saw Munro Malvern, I was satisfied that I had found the man whom Leslie Carrollton had spent the best part of his life in trying to find."

The little gathering at the shanty finally broke up, and all but the brother and sister dispersed to their various places of abode.

It was when the brilliant spectral light of the midnight moon streamed over the pine-crested mountain-tops into the golden gulch, that the city of Deadwood was aroused into a great commotion, such as it rarely had known before.

Out of the gulch at either end of the town dashed what seemed to be an army of masked men, with wild yells and shouts. Here they come, now rushing in a great body of cavalry, down into the center of the main street, where they meet in front of the stone jail wherein is confined the murderer, Munro Malvern. From a thousand points the astonished Deadwoodites look on.

They do not raise a hand to stay this strange band, for they recognize Nugget Ned at the head, and of the masked Knights of the Gulch there is such a swarm, that it would seem an act of madness to attack them with a hope of preventing the lynching.

Besides, very careless are these people of Deadwood how a criminal dies, or by whose hands, so long as "he gits sent off in good shape."

Hark! Nugget rises in his stirrups, and his tones, clear as an Alpine horn, ring through the gulch:

"Bring forth the prisoner, and hang him to the limb of the handiest tree. Though he is my father, I will not show so vile a man mercy."

There was a commotion—several of the knights had dismounted and entered the jail.

"By Shemany Shackson, et's a pad day mid dose prisoner," cried Judge Jacob, who, with several others stood in front of Rosebud Rob's shanty.

"I don't wish ash I was in dem boots mit Munro Malvern."

"Great spirit o' old Methus'ler, no!" put in Colonel Bill Stokes. "But et shows ther virtue, pluck an' sublime beauty triumphs over the evil o' mankind. Beauty like mine can never perish."

"Bill!" said Baltimore Bess, deprecatingly, "w'en will ye ever let up a-braggin' about yer beauty—especially w'en ye're cast in ther shade by our Sport wi' ther rosebud in his buttonhole!"

At this minute the prisoner was led out, amid wild shouts from the Knight-Vigilantes, and strung up to a tree in plain sight.

Then, upon the call of a horn, they all dashed off down the gulch, headed by the man who called himself Nugget Ned, and were seen no more.

When the citizens arrived at the scene of the lynching, and cut down the body, the spirit of Munro Malvern, *alias* Garyl Sanderson, had taken its flight.

And pinned to his breast was a copy of the strange photograph which the guilty man had received previous to the trial and his crushing defeat.

It was an emblem of man's enmity toward man; it told the strange, truthful tale of a son's hatred, and his trailing of a criminal father down to death.

Few that gazed upon the stiffening body could say that they were sorry.

A little more will complete the story proper under the title of Rosebud Rob.

The bodies of Munro Malvern and Bel Helene were buried on the following day, and headstones will be erected over their graves at the expense of the new heiress of the Big Bullion mine.

And in all probability Sheriff Shelby will be the "lucky dog" who will lead the graceful and worthy Jessie to the altar of Hymen, sometime during the coming spring months.

True to his word, Nugget Ned was not seen again in the vicinity of Deadwood, and where he seeks a new field for exploits can only be a matter of conjecture.

Colonel Bill Stokes, his "Honor" the Judge, and Persimmon Bill still make the magic city their headquarters, while Baltimore Bess is "still a man of the people."

And, wonderful to relate, there is now in Deadwood a very reverend gentleman, by the name of Ralph Lamont, who, at last accounts, was trying to get up a Sabbath-school. Whatever caused his sudden change I am unable to relate. We wish him a grand success.

Hickory Hank was shot in November last for horse-stealing. Of his associates I am uninformed.

Rosebud Rob is rather uncertain in his movements. He is literally here, there, and everywhere. He is still the cool, nervy Sport of old, and often takes part in adventures worthy to relate. Doubtless we shall hear from him again some future day.

THE END.

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